



Article

The moral aporia of race in international relations

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Abstract

Drawing on recent scholarship on race, post-colonialism, and ethics in the field of international relations, I return to the ‘first debate’ in the field regarding realism versus liberalism to highlight how racialized international political practices a century ago shaped theoretical assumptions, deferrals, and absences in ways that continued to resonate throughout the century. In reviewing several prominent periods of the past 100 years, I argue that (a) a powerful, ongoing moral aporia regarding race has marked the practice of international politics and the study of international relations over the century, despite important challenges and (b) it is critically important for the field as a whole to confront both the aporia and these challenges to understand its own moral precarity and to dent ongoing racialized injustices.

Keywords

aporia, colonialism, international politics, international relations, morality, race, racism

Introduction: the aporia of (hidden) conviction¹

My simple task in this contribution is to address and analyze morality in international relations (IR) over the past 100 years. I say ‘simple’, because the review process has poked a number of conceptual bears that each comprise layers and layers of assumptions about theories of international relations and practices of international politics (IP). Thoroughly investigating processes of socialization and resocialization in the field or discipline, and also providing openings to potentially new ontologies cannot be tackled in a single article, especially one that, according to the editors’ instructions, should make ‘big statements about critical themes’.

Thus, I begin with a return, to what Yosef Lapid famously labeled the ‘first debate’² of 100 years ago, to ground my argument that the practice of IP has not fully grasped its own moral aporia regarding race, racialized conquest, and inequality, nor have the theories that arose in close companionship to this practice. I employ ‘international politics’ or

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IP to refer to practice, including policy, and ‘international relations’ or IR to refer to scholarship in the field. Regarding both, my focus is on IP and IR as practiced by actors and scholars in major powers of the global north, or west, not because they represent the sum total of either theory or practice, but because they have generally defined both for readers in numerous IR journals, including this one. I understand international political practice and international relations scholarship to be tightly interconnected, with scholarship mostly reacting to but also occasionally shaping practice. Moreover, over time theorists and practitioners have sometimes overlapped or changed places in government, the private sector, foundations, and non-profits. As a result, moral issues that implicate practice cannot exclude scholarship, and vice versa.

This ‘first debate’, regarding realism versus idealism/utopianism, brought differing views about morality in IP and IR to the forefront. This debate continues to shape theory and practice in the present, even though it oversimplified numerous and complex issues.³ It also took place during a peak period of European and North American colonialism, that is, the point at which colonialism in much of the world was consolidated while anti-colonial movements and independence struggles were gaining steam. Most self-described realists favored maintaining their respective imperial statuses, although liberals inscribed racialized hierarchies by establishing ‘mandates’ through the League of Nations for non-white peoples. Although this period was also one of full-fledged anti-imperialist sentiment, self-described ‘progressives’ in the great powers still frequently divided along racialized lines, and even early feminist thinkers demonstrated an equivocal stance vis-à-vis race.⁴ As the century continued, theorizing about the Cold War and the virtues of capitalism versus communism became predominant. Far from resolving questions of race, however, this focus relied on developmentalist assumptions that drew on previous racialized categories without resolving their contradictions, arguably overshadowing theorizing about the implications of massive decolonization around the world from the 1940s into the 1970s and beyond. Hence, the excavation of racialized assumptions in theory and practice was deferred. During the post-Cold War period, much of the attention to conflict and poverty re-racialized inequality by promoting a form of liberal humanitarianism that critics charge with enacting a ‘white saviour complex’.⁵ In the post-9/11/2001 era, racialization has become partially refocused to bring Orientalist stereotypes (once again) center-stage as a politics of fear, epitomized by the Islamophobia engendered by the war on terror.

The idea of morality encompasses an articulation of ‘right’ (vs. wrong) action, and a conceptualization of the kind of agent who engages in it. As Kimberly Hutchings points out, concepts of ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ are often used interchangeably, and form part of ‘the broad category of the “normative,” encompassing not only the rights and wrongs of interactions between individuals and collectives but also the structures that enable and constrain action’.⁶ The concept of *aporia* indicates a contradiction that is irresolvable. A moral *aporia* regarding race begs the question of whether, and if so why and how, ideas about morality in IP and IR contain racialized contradictions that become impossible to resolve, at least in the contexts of extant frameworks.⁷ I do not assert that questions of race and racialization present the only moral *aporia* in IP and IR, and certainly an intersectional analysis of race/gender/class, and so on, is necessary to excavate fully IR and IP’s moral contradictions.⁸ But I do assert that racialized constructions and imaginaries

have plagued both the field and the practice of IP over the past 100 years, breeding sometimes explicit and other times implicit assumptions of non-white and non-European/North American inferiority that manage to sweep into their orbit peoples and forms of knowledge that emanate from other political, economic, cultural, religious, and social systems.

It is necessary to (re)state at the outset that race, like other identity markers, is a social construction rather than an objective category: Its modern manifestations were constructed and solidified in tandem with European expansion (territorial, economic, cultural) throughout the world. Seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers, including John Locke and Immanuel Kant, formulated hierarchies of racial difference between Europeans and others, upon which scientists like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach built theories of alleged biologically determined racial superiority and inferiority.⁹ Nevertheless, as Thomas McCarthy points out, “‘race’ was never *purely* a biological construction’. Rather:

It always comprised congeries of elements, including not only other ‘material’ factors such as geographical origin and genealogical descent, but also a shifting array of ‘mental’ characteristics such as cognitive ability and moral character, as well as a mobile host of cultural and behavioral traits.¹⁰

This shifting array became normalized, combining with theories of eugenics by the late nineteenth century to lend the construction of race an allegedly scientific cast. By the beginning of the early twentieth century, the 100-year period addressed by this Special Issue, racialized assumptions about global power and practice had become reified. This is why race, colonialism, and imperialism should be understood as intersecting components of ‘developmental schemes, in which designated groups have been represented as not only racially distinct but also as occupying different stages of development’, which in turn inscribe ‘various forms of hierarchical relations’.¹¹ ‘Race’ is therefore a slippery thing, constructed of ephemeral materials. On the one hand, it is socially constructed of multiple elements that do not always appear to be present in IR theories and practices; on the other hand its attendant assumptions about superior power and forms of ‘civilisation’ have produced astoundingly violent consequences against people who are racialized in specific ways. Prominent social theorist and political scientist Achille Mbembe, for example, pulls no punches in reflecting on how the moral aporia regarding race in IR and IP has affected non-white peoples over several centuries:

By reducing the body and the living being to matters of appearance, skin, and color, by granting skin and color the status of fiction based on biology, the Euro-American world in particular has made blackness and race two sides of a single coin, two sides of a codified madness. Race, operating over the past centuries as a foundational category that is at once material and phantasmic, has been at the root of catastrophe, the cause of extraordinary psychic devastation and of innumerable crimes and massacres.¹²

At the heart of the moral aporia regarding race in IR and IP lies the continuation of developmentalist assumptions that result from this phantasm in both theory and practice, and their naturalization in concepts of deductive theory and rational, as well as ethical,

international management. The state is arguably the privileged moral agent in IR, especially for classical and neorealist as well as neoliberal perspectives. Realists have over time naturalized colonialist relations of power, deferred racial equality, and even taken up racialized developmentalist hierarchies among allegedly primitive versus allegedly advanced states in developing models of power politics. In liberal constructs, individuals are the primary agent, sometimes along with groups based on different forms of commitment, coding, and social construction. Again, however, racialized hierarchies of difference that had become normalized before the time of the first debate¹³ have continued to shape liberal theoretical trends as well as practices, particularly through developmentalist legitimations of aid and help. The realisms and liberalisms/utopianisms of the period – advertently or inadvertently – inscribed racialized hierarchies of difference and alterity in their conceptualizations of IP, as well as their practices of diplomatic negotiation, institution-building, and intervention. This inscription prevents the equal achievement of the kind of equality and freedom promoted by liberals. It also obfuscates the historically derived injustices masked by forms of classical as well as neorealism.

To be sure, the realisms and alleged utopianisms of the first debate were diverse phenomena, representing a wide range of moral and ethical positions, and they have begotten an even wider range of concerns and ethical stances over time.¹⁴ Practitioners and theorists struggled with the racialization of IP in important ways, most often by bringing the injustices of colonialism and imperialism to the forefront, and by noting their perpetuation in post-colonial relations of power. But as John Hobson points out, anti-imperialisms also formed part of racially problematic ‘Eurocentric’ frameworks and visions of IP and IR.¹⁵ The fact of these struggles, then, also points to the existence of the moral aporia at issue. Although it is impossible to do justice in a single article to the moral implications of all of IR and IP over the past century, the ongoing reverberations of the first debate indicate that questions of race have over time been either deferred, as Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney explicate¹⁶ or imbricated into morally problematic hierarchies of development.

My argument that IR and IP are racialized is not new. An increasing number of scholars in the field of international relations have drawn attention to the racialization of both international practice and IR’s disciplinary origins over the past 100 years. Beginning in 1996, Siba N’Zatioula Grovogui blazed the trail for the former and its connections to IR and social theory *writ large*.¹⁷ Roxanne Lynn Doty also insisted in 1996 that we take time to deconstruct and expose the problematic assumptions behind imperialism, Eurocentrism, and colonialism.¹⁸ Grovogui and Robbie Shilliam have since taken on the racialized nature of both theory and practice in virtually all of the conventional subfields of the discipline.¹⁹ Catia Confortini has grappled with the contradictions of feminist activism regarding race in her clear yet nuanced critique of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), although Anna Agantheangelou, L.H.M. Ling, and Shirin Rai have explicated the connections among gender, race, and empire.²⁰ David Blaney, Naeem Inayatullah, Mustapha Kamal Pasha, Himadeep Muppidi, and Jeanne Morefield have highlighted the racialized assumptions that stretch from the Scottish Enlightenment to contemporary liberalism, in the process coding Amerindians, Africans, and Muslims, among many others, as racially inferior.²¹ In cognate fields, Michael Hanchard has just published a work that exposes the racialized construction of democracy studies in

comparative politics and political theory.²² Post-colonial theory informs all of the above in different ways and to differing degrees.²³ Ido Oren, Robert Vitalis, Lucian Ashworth, John Hobson, David Long, Brian Schmidt, and Robbie Shilliam have each provided eye-opening analyses of the disciplinary origins of the field of IR, taking apart the Anglo-American genealogy in particular to connect theory to practice, despite interesting debates about temporal and conceptual boundaries.²⁴ Audie Klotz and Neta Crawford, in different ways, have exposed the construction and – in some cases – the partial deconstruction of racialized norms in international practice.²⁵ Taking seriously, these intersecting bodies of work, I relate them to additional evidence to emphasize the moral silences, gaps, and inconsistencies that plague much of IR. Although I, too, have increasingly paid attention to these gaps and silences,²⁶ I do not exempt my earlier work from their implications (as discussed later), and assert that we should pay special attention to the intersection between IR and IP.

Morality debates at the close of the Great War: 'everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned'²⁷

One of the implications of the first debate in international relations scholarship was to ground developments in international ethics over the century in terms of 'is' versus 'ought' questions, which theorists soon connected to questions of what should and could be expected of different kinds of moral agents, particularly the state versus the individual. In 1919 the world had just emerged from what would almost immediately become known as the unnecessary war for large numbers of people: There appeared to be no justification, or moral rationale, for the huge loss of life, destruction of landscapes and economies, or social trauma resulting from 'the Great War'.²⁸ The line of Yeats's famous poem quoted above reflects and refracts many of the anxieties of trying to make sense of a conflagration that IR theory continues to debate.

After World War I, stripping away even the 'ceremony' of innocence by 'the blood-dimmed tide' of the war begged urgent questions about agency and responsibility for right and wrong in war and peace. Moral debate was ubiquitous because numerous survivors of the conflagration said it had to be. In many ways, the certainties of the past were gone, and arguments about alleged utopias and purported realisms produced numerous visions of stark dystopias. This context created possibilities for moral renewal and change. Still, each of these utopias, realisms, and dystopias connected morality to IR and IP in ways that privileged the state – as in need of harnessing for some notion of the good (liberal utopias), an unalterable fact of international life (realisms) or an always-already danger (dystopias). This state-centric veneer masked racialized (as well as ethnicized, religionized, classist, and gendered) alterities that were imbricated into assumptions about the discipline of IR and the practice of IP.²⁹ The question of what to do about the state and its power to destroy became the primary moral question of the day for many citizen-activists in peace movements, as well as for early IR theorists of the first debate.

Proponents of what would become known as liberal morality in Europe and the United States viewed the war that had just ended as giving arms manufacturers license to create ever more destructive forms of weapons, and they particularly feared the potential

combination of chemical weapons and bombers that might be harnessed to deliver them to injure and kill vast numbers of civilians.³⁰ The liberal dream of comparative advantage had been perverted by ever-powerful 'munitions makers'.

Thus the solution for liberals was to contain the Pandora's box of destruction by establishing agreements to reverse the numbers and kinds of weapons available, and establish the institutional mechanisms to monitor them while denying the immorality of greed. Liberals, then, focused on containing the unchecked collusion between state military power and the diversion of productive resources into ever-more-dangerous weapons by individuals who acted immorally.

Emergent 'realists' noted the importance of moral considerations that could blunt the bald exercise of power for power's sake. (I use the term emergent because it was during this period that the label was created in IR; and put it in quotation marks because those concerned created a self-referential label to differentiate themselves from non-realist others.³¹) At the same time, they created a universalized framework to delimit the moral authority of such concerns. As Yeats presciently noted, the 'mere anarchy ... loosed upon the world' was quickly normalized and theologized as the primary foundation for interpreting what had happened.

Diplomatic elites did not know how to accommodate the rising claim to moral agency of peace groups, especially, in international affairs. These movements organized into 'voluntary associations' in Europe and North America, sometimes spilling out of liberal boundaries into socialism and communism, and movements for ethnic and religious solidarity and against imperialism in Latin America, South and East Asia, and Africa.³² It is critical to note that some early twentieth-century white socialists, communists, pacifists, and feminists in Europe and North America challenged both realist and liberal readings of morality. Phyllis Lassner, for example, shows how mostly white British women writers such as Olivia Manning and Elspeth Huxley, among others, 'not only bear witness to colonialism's complex relations and consequences, but also narrate actions and arguments to expedite its end'.³³ Feminist peace scholars such as Catia Confortini, however, also point out the persistent manifestations of the moral aporia: Emily Greene Balch of the WILPF tried hard to integrate the WILPF even while shutting down black women's voices and positions on the connections between racism in the United States and racism internationally.³⁴

White left-liberal and Marxist critics also challenged European imperialism in Africa and Asia and US interventionism in Latin America, as well as the latter's imperialism in the Philippines and Cuba. One of the most famous white critics of European cruelty in Africa was E.D. Morel, whose work with Roger Casement exposed the extreme violence of Belgian's King Leopold II.³⁵ But Morel's understanding of racial equality contained serious contradictions, exemplifying the moral aporia at issue, as evidenced by his opposition to the use of French – and especially colonial – troops in the 1923 invasion of the Ruhr/Rhineland. His opposition was not on the grounds that men from the colonies should not be forced to fight and die for their colonial overlords, instead it was based on a sexualized racism that charged black African men with aggression against white European women.³⁶ While colonialism and imperialism were contested during the early twentieth century, too often both theory and practice masked domestic and international racialized policies, normalizing their evils as a necessary, if unfortunate, component of either the civilizing process or the stewardship of great power management.

Thus, as John Hobson and Jeanne Morefield point out, anti-imperialist thinkers (including some in peace movements) incorporated and frequently furthered Eurocentric thinking.³⁷ But this morally problematic argumentation differed from that of realist morality, which gradually inscribed an impenetrable ethical boundary between the ethics of judging actions of the state versus actions of the individual. In complementary fashion yet with important differences, incipient realists such as Walter Lippmann, E.H. Carr, and Reinhold Niebuhr reinforced state legitimacy over any action by citizens, social movements, or other 'non-governmental' forms of association.

Lippmann voiced, the diplomatic irritation with the growing power of peace movements; he focused his punditry on delegitimizing the broadening of state diplomatic practice to include citizens.³⁸ In partially drawing on Saint Augustine's 'two cities', Niebuhr created the theology of 'Christian realism' and provided a religious gloss on the moral code that he helped to construct especially for the secular state. Niebuhr frequently deplored US racial policies and even defended the theoretical possibility of black revolution (although he did not develop this theorization further), but on a more personal level, he argued in favor of delaying the integration of one of his own parishes.³⁹ Carr, like Niebuhr, represented a left-of-center realism that was sobered by the war even while it grew distressed with liberal institutionalist projects and hopes, labeling them both naïve and dangerous. Carr focused his ire on liberals, but in doing so created an imposed, utopian 'other' that was also dangerous in its overly expansive reach.⁴⁰ He hinted at the moral aporia of race in international relations by drawing attention to the imperialism embedded in much liberal thought. Nevertheless, he ultimately deferred action to rectify its injustices, insisting instead that the 'constant intrusion' of power renders equality impossible, and that at most, '[t]he process of give-and-take must apply to challenges to the existing order'.⁴¹

Moreover, the policies and conceptual frameworks of post-World War I realist diplomats and scholars demonstrate the racialized assumptions underlying such processes. For example, Austen Chamberlain, who, unlike his brother Neville, is often considered to be a doyen of 'prudent' diplomacy, exhibited the realist's suspicion of disarmament and arbitration, artfully managing most of the time to block peace movement demands for both. Still, he might have agreed to some limited controls on weapons if only Europeans were at issue. But he continually refused restraints on armaments as well as compulsory arbitration of disputes, even when peace movement pressure was at its height, because of the purported necessity to have 'freedom of movement' to protect British 'vital interests', meaning the ability to employ these weapons to maintain 'order' and put down unrest in the colonies.⁴² Colonies were the repositories of people who were racially coded as inferior, requiring specific methods of control for British interests to be ensured.

Surely, one might argue, realists' unsympathetic understanding of human relations made no distinction between people, and liberals sincerely believed in the spread of prosperity to all, regardless of any racial coding. But in developing what we now think of as classical realist as well as liberal thought, scholars, scholar-diplomats, and scholar-activists avoided examining the racially problematic assumptions underlying new institutional frameworks and ongoing forms of intervention, reinforcing, and normalizing the moral aporia of race. Many of the most influential liberal-internationalist politicians

justified empire, including President Woodrow Wilson, Lord Robert Cecil, the off-and-on leader of the British League of Nations Union and sometime Conservative cabinet-member, and General Jan Christian Smuts, South African icon of the League of Nations. They as well as realist politicians believed in the civilizing mission of either empire in general or the 'white race' in particular.

Woodrow Wilson – now disgraced but then lauded – became the standard-bearer for the post-World War I conception of morality that would constrain state aggression that he deemed illegitimate, while managing unruly populations domestically and abroad. The League of Nations, therefore, enshrined the concept of 'mandates' for peoples and territories allegedly unable to govern themselves (including many former German colonies and former Ottoman territories). Agreements by Wilson, Smuts, and the British Round Table Group promoted the idea of 'civilisation' for these peoples in part through the exploitation of their resources by powers such as Britain and France.⁴³

Wilson's interventionism in Latin America is also well known. As US President, he ordered the invasions of Mexico between 1914 and 1916, Haiti in 1915, and the Dominican Republic in 1916. This record, along with his long-time racism at home toward black citizens, has today forced a reconsideration of his legacy. Wilson not only promoted racialized concepts of alterity abroad, but also reversed moves toward racial equality made in the United States, especially by appointing numerous white supremacists to federal positions and segregating the Civil Service.⁴⁴ Wilson, in fact, campaigned on a racist platform of preventing black encroachment in middle-class positions. Even *The New York Times* Editorial Board recently concluded that Wilson 'was an unapologetic racist whose administration rolled back the gains that African-Americans achieved just after the Civil War, purged black workers from influential jobs and transformed the government into an instrument of white supremacy'.⁴⁵ white suffragists followed by excluding women of color from their demands for the 19th amendment.⁴⁶

General Jan Christian Smuts's racism was emblematic of the South African regime. But perhaps more important for morality in international relations was the ease with which Smuts's articulations of international 'responsibility' moved between the South African and international (i.e., League) contexts. Siba Grovogui states, 'Smuts conveniently drew from old and new justifications for colonial expansion' in successfully making the case to Wilson and other League creators for the annexation of Southwest Africa (Namibia). These justifications included 'the obligation toward uncivilized natives' 'the obligation of the trustee toward the international community' and the strategic rationale of denying any influence in the area to the Japanese.⁴⁷ The Germans had committed genocide against the Herero population, and Smuts presented South African annexation as morally necessary according to both liberal and realist criteria.

Liberal thinkers rarely challenged such assumptions in their conceptual or policy frameworks, instead building on racialized ideas of civilizational superiority. Jeanne Morefield shows how the thought of Alfred Zimmern and Gilbert Murray represented both a continuation of nineteenth century liberal thought and a preview of liberal theory's twentieth century idealist aspirations. Moorefield calls the resulting moral aporia 'a paternalistic global politics based on ... the supposedly natural relationship between imperial and colonized societies'.⁴⁸

Moreover, in the midst of attempts to reinforce and challenge the moral aporia on race, non-white voices were systematically excluded from policy and theory alike.⁴⁹ As Grovogui, Vitalis, and others have shown, such exclusions masked racialized constructions in both international practice and international relations as a developing field. W.E.B. DuBois's work is now being recognized by some IR scholars for its importance to international relations, especially for the clarity of its exposition of the structural immorality of slavery and colonialism, and its articulation of pan-Africanism as an important alternative and historical corrective (prior to the articulations of European Union that IR has focused on as the model for supranational expansion around the globe).⁵⁰ Du Bois, Ida B. Wells (in her work exposing the domestic-transnational connections of slavery and lynching),⁵¹ and the prolific thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance are all critical for understanding the underpinnings and articulations of the moral aporia on race. These and numerous other non-white thinkers need not only to be incorporated but their insights, concepts, and frameworks *prioritized* in discussions about morality in international relations.

After the second world war: 'things fall apart; the center cannot hold'⁵²

A prominent narrative about post-World War II world order concerns the comfort derived from successful 'lessons learned'. I refer here to the kind of realist/liberal accord that, at least for a time, came to underlie new forms of US-led economic management.⁵³ According to this narrative, the interwar period demonstrated (a) that the great powers had to unite to manage the world, as they had done to reverse the evil of fascism and (b) that institutions could be created to align domestic and international economic goals to achieve liberal notions of prosperity and well-being. Although this narrative remains powerful today, it did not take long for it to be rivaled by fears of the destructive power of new generations of nuclear weapons. Nuclear strategy games involving millions of potential deaths became part and parcel of policy and academic training (including my own), even while new activism against these weapons and new theories that would become the subfield of 'peace studies' challenged the resources spent on weapons rather than social welfare.

For most of the world outside of the west, the post-World War II era was a period of considerable celebration, or at least a sense of renewed possibility, as colonialism was indeed falling apart. From the 1940s into the 1970s and 1980s, dozens of countries obtained independence from former colonial powers, after struggles that were often bloody (India, Kenya, Congo, Algeria, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, among many others), but sometimes relatively peaceful if not still difficult (Ghana, Senegal). But the post-colonial 'centre' also did not hold, as Chinua Achebe's novel about Nigeria's disintegration painfully illustrates. The Biafra/Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970 was not merely a domestic affair, Cilas Kemedjio points out, because Britain and France played off the Nigerian and Biafran sides, respectively, to maintain their post-colonial economic interests.⁵⁴

What is also fascinating during this period is the incredible ferment and development of social and political thought that challenged the moral aporia of race. The work of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, among others, today forms the foundation of much

decolonial theorizing about race, and the interactions between writers/theorists such as Du Bois and theorists/politicians such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana are legendary as foundational moments of challenge to the practice of IP.⁵⁵ Coming from parts of the world that were *a priori* excluded from consideration in theoretical development, however, such thought made insufficient impact at the time on the field of IR. By the late 1970s, however, 'third world' challenges to IP had gained traction in forums from Bandung (1955) to the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of 1975. At the same time, the work of Edward Said provided the foundation for the emerging field of post-colonialism.⁵⁶

The rise of neo-Marxist dependency theories in Latin America during the 1970s posed a considerable challenge to the realist/liberal parameters of the first debate, as did Johan Galtung's structural theories of peace and conflict. The World Order Models Project (WOMP) of Richard Falk, Saul Mendlovitz, and Ashish Nandy also challenged the liberal/realist consensus underlying great power economic and military management.⁵⁷ These approaches continue to resonate today, although many commentators see such a third world challenge to western hegemony (in IP) as having dissipated by the 1980s.⁵⁸

There is insufficient space to explore all aspects of the huge gap between emergent post-colonial theorizing and emergent (neo)realisms and liberalisms, but several theoretical moves demonstrate important aspects of the implicit assumptions that allowed the moral aporia to continue, primarily by redirecting, ignoring, or silencing claims for racial, political, and economic equality. Many liberals became increasingly concerned with 'transnationalism', especially actors and movements that crossed state boundaries and might challenge post-war liberal economic management. The framework of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, for example, disaggregated areas of western economic hegemony that were more susceptible (i.e., vulnerable) to challenge versus those that were less susceptible (i.e., sensitive), in conditions of 'complex interdependence'.⁵⁹

It is also interesting to return to the classic work of Hans Morgenthau (and Kenneth Thompson), *Politics Among Nations*, to understand at least part of the realist critique to the challenge of Marxism and peace studies. Morgenthau includes in this book an extended discussion of imperialism, engaging in a debate with neo-Marxist and pacifist critics who misunderstood simple power politics. Imperialism, for Morgenthau, is dynamic, not to be confused with 'a politics of the status quo'.⁶⁰ Instead, Morgenthau (or Morgenthau and Thompson) divides imperialism into its military, economic, and cultural aspects, to argue that each operated according to its own logic, and that military imperialism proceeded from power politics pure and simple, usually to be followed by economic and cultural imperial forms. Morgenthau wrote, 'Thus, in both Great Britain and the United States, much of the modern debate on imperialism follows *after* [emphasis mine] the process of imperialistic expansion, condemning or justifying it in retrospect'.⁶¹ Morgenthau's isolation of and emphasis on the role of political/military over economic and cultural power, as the primary driver of and major distinction between status quo and imperialist politics, regards 'weak states or ... politically empty spaces' as legitimately ripe for the picking. Power becomes excised out of its historical, racialized development, and rendered objective: Societies with less lethal military technology are viewed as developmentally 'empty', implicitly affirming the Eurocentric categories that produce the shifting assumptions about race.⁶²

Morgenthau's realism increasingly morphed into purportedly deductive theories of power that could not fully escape developmentalist assumptions and their racialized underpinnings. A fascinating quote by none other than Kenneth Waltz, for example, reveals important assumptions grounding his own realist framework. As such, it merits an extensive citation, because in it he explains the logic of his own historical and geographical inclusions and exclusions:

When I [started out in international politics], my wife and I realized you cannot pay attention to everything, so I said to myself 'one continent that I am going to leave aside is Africa'. I preferred to concentrate on Europe and China. I did a pretty good deal of work on China because I saw it ripe to become one of the most important parts of the world of which I knew nothing ... But Africa is kind of a blank spot for me, apart from casual observation ...

In fact, a criticism people used to make to me was that Africa was clearly an anarchic arena, and yet African states did not fight much among themselves. How, then, would a Realist like myself explain that? Well, I did by invoking Turney-High's book in anthropology, which was published – I believe – in the 1920s. There, he made the very valid point that countries have to obtain a certain level of self-consciousness as being a political entity, and a certain level of competence before they are able to fight one another. Turney-High's illustration was very clear with his study of the peoples he referred to as the 'Californians', who were such a primitive people that they did not have the ability to form groups or fight as a group. A consciousness and competence at a certain level is needed before a group is able to systematically impose on another group – whether in the form of warfare or in other ways. I think that, for a long time, Africa was in that condition, and that, as it proceeds away from that condition, African countries will be able to fight wars against one another. In a historical sense, though, that is an implication of advancement.⁶³

Deconstructing this quote could provide the basis for an entire article, but at least two things stand out: (a) Waltz's structural realism was formulated by explicitly ignoring an entire continent that did not fit his preconceptions of what counts in IR, and (b) Waltz legitimized this decision by actually grounding his functional logic on the developmentalist assumptions inspired by early twentieth century anthropology, which successors have long decried as irremediably racialized.⁶⁴ As Roxanne Lynn Doty states (in discussing a developmentalist passage in a book by Steven Krasner), such a logic, with the opposition it entails between (in this case) 'primitive' and 'competent' groups, is presented as 'foundational fact' rather than 'as a problematic distinction that is part of an even more problematic body of "knowledge"'.⁶⁵

Yet a third major assumption in Waltz's description of his thinking concerns the content of the developmentalist logic to which he ascribes. Groups that are more advanced are capable of violence and war; groups without the requisite level of 'consciousness and competence' are not. Ironically, this of course turns upside down the common liberal narrative regarding Africa and Africans throughout the century of concern in this issue: that the violence on the continent is a product of non-democratic (read primitive) ethnized and religionized conflict!

Thus, different IR frameworks have produced different developmentalist conclusions from the ephemeral and shifting characteristics of the same racialized moral aporia. The point is not that the phantasm of racial difference is the only grounding for moral codes

in IR and IP, but instead that moral concerns – from how to manage power and state interests to how to create institutional stability – have relied on the silences, elisions, and suppressions that have been shaped by racialized assumptions about development, order, and progress.

These silences, elisions and suppressions have not disappeared. The end of the Cold War (1989–1991) brought challenges to the realist/liberal faith in the moral superiority of superpower and liberal institutional management of world affairs (including the fraying of US political authority and the potential diminution of the European Union), but racialized assumptions continued to shape new institutional forms of management. An important example concerns the phenomenon of humanitarianism, which has also been called ‘the humanitarian international’, and its production of a moral order formed by ‘humanitarian reason’.⁶⁶ The latter represents ‘a powerful social imaginary’ that mobilizes moral sentiment to govern suffering, justifying economic and military interventions, as well as attendant forms of ‘humanitarian government’.⁶⁷ It is also constitutive of the ongoing racialized moral aporia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This humanitarian order brings together western and transnationalized publics with states and U.N. agencies to create new forms of ‘partnership’ (one of the new buzzwords for implementing post-Cold War moral codes).⁶⁸ In these relationships, nongovernmental organizations are delegated to give ‘early warning’ of conflict, and provide aid in sites of suffering. The ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) and the International Criminal Court, new components of the IR/IP architecture, provide post-Cold War justifications for varying degrees of military intervention.⁶⁹ These interventions privilege interference in Africa and Asia while overlooking crimes against humanity committed by countries such as the United States and United Kingdom in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to critics.⁷⁰

Economic intervention occurs in the form of humanitarian and development aid by a complex of nongovernmental organizations, UN agencies, and state donor agencies. Such aid has become ‘neoliberalized’ into a kind of Foucauldian governmentality, in which nongovernmental humanitarian organizations work hand-in-glove with state and UN agencies to provide assistance according to market logics. These logics promote interventions that seek (albeit often unsuccessfully) to obtain quick results for limited investment of time and money,⁷¹ in the process inscribing racialized victimhood on populations of the global south. Humanitarian government highlights violence to non-white bodies, but does so in ways that erase white/northern responsibility for the fragility of political and economic structures within the global south.

These interventions inherit and continue the racialized phantasms of earlier interventions in Congo and Biafra, among numerous others. Cilas Kemedjio, for example, argues that the moral discourses of nongovernmental groups who wanted to aid starving Biafrans in the late 1960s established the foundation for contemporary military interventionism in the present. Kemedjio highlights in particular, the racialization of late-colonial and post-colonial moral codes that seek to save non-white bodies from themselves and their environments.⁷²

Although realists and liberals debate the degree to which state interests should limit or foster intervention in societies riven by violence, critics show how the ‘humanitarian

international' established and perpetuates a 'white saviour industrial complex' that has the effect, in both IP and IR, of once again locking 'non-whites ... in[to] their supposed origins'.⁷³

Morality in IR in a new century: 'turning and turning in the widening gyre'?⁷⁴

Non-white thinkers have long drawn attention to the racialized moral aporia of the past 100 years (and beyond), arguing that attempts to pretend that it does not exist are unconvincing.⁷⁵ And while the bulk of IR scholarship has until recently ignored race, its manifestations have been evident enough for those who have scratched the surface.

I explore this moral aporia in part because I did scratch the surface but then deferred the problem of race in my earlier work on the interwar period. I was troubled at the time by the arguments made against the use of colonial troops in the Ruhr valley in 1923 – were otherwise 'progressive' peace activists rallying against colonial troops because they were black? Weren't they simply against troops in general? The moral aporia regarding race in European and US interwar peace movements was emerging from the fog. But what to do with it, when the 'primary' issue I was exploring concerned movement/government struggles about the normative agendas of disarmament and arbitration? Anti-colonialism also figured prominently among many (although certainly not all) peace movement activists and their understandings of the causes of war. How, then, could this anti-colonialism be accompanied by such assumptions of racialized inequality and violent sexuality? I began to explore this as well as many other questions in research challenging the implications of race, slavery, and colonialism as well as religion in ethical constructs.⁷⁶

Such questions become all the more important, given the serious new contestations around racial lines in the early twenty-first century. After 9/11/2001, military strategies in the United States and other parts of the global north increasingly constructed danger as both non-white and predominantly Muslim. Thus, race has also become religionized. In Mbembe's interpretation, 'for the first time in human history, the term "black" has been generalized' ... Racialized categories abound, most of them feeding into everyday practices of Islamophobia'.⁷⁷ Said, among others, might well respond that Islamophobia also has a long history and that it is 'orientalism' that has become generalized. But the point here is that race has always been an unstable, pseudo-scientific category. For Mbembe, "culture" and "religion" have increasingly replaced "biology",⁷⁸ but we might instead understand both culture/religion and biology as forming shifting components of the unstable moral aporia of race.

In many ways, the moral aporia of race, which I liken here to the vortex, or gyre, that turns so insistently in Yeats's poem, has widened to the point that it can no longer be hidden, elided, or suppressed. Throngs support racialized populism in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, and beyond, in demonstrating anger against the failed liberal promise of prosperity for all, and trying to reclaim order and security for white populations alone.

As a result, there is also a growing awareness of the impact of racialized policies in campaigns such as black Lives Matter and movements to ensure the rights of immigrants and Muslims in western societies. Within the field of IR, scholars are decentering

western-centric knowledge through several intersecting strategies, including in-depth research on non-Eurocentric histories of the world, insistence on intersections and replacements for Euro-centric philosophy and social theory, and detailed examinations of the racialized origins and development of IR theories and concepts, as well as diplomatic practices.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the pressures for re-establishing comfortable forms of deferment, elision, and suppression remain strong in both IP and IR, as does racialized developmentalist logic.⁸⁰ But if and when such expressions settle again into ‘merely’ the discourse of paternalism, it will be all-too-easy to reassert the security of conventional moral codes. Just as oceanic gyres may swell in poetry but do not completely disappear in practice, the moral aporia of race in the practice and study of IR has considerable longevity and staying-power.

Throughout this contribution, I have implicitly advanced an ethics of equality, criticizing IR and IP for assuming its importance but refusing, suppressing, or deferring its enactment. Of course, such an ethics remains vague – equality of and for whom, or what? In emphasizing the moral aporia of race, the first task is to recognize the problem, taking on the responsibility of pursuing its contours in our own work and that of other scholars, and challenging its manifestations in international political practice. The next task requires a willingness to dismantle the ontological and developmentalist hold of state and individual-centric moral codes, and an openness to ontologies, epistemologies, and conceptualizations that bring dignity and full agency to the ‘human’, including in its relation to the ‘nonhuman’ (in terms of environmental concerns as well as non-western cosmologies).⁸¹ This project need not romanticize alternative ethics, nor does it provide an easy solution to the phantasmical problem of race. Instead, it suggests that taking seriously the racialized moral aporia at issue requires sustained investigation of IP and reflexivity regarding IR, and the willingness to dismantle the developmentalist assumptions of the first debate once and for all.

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Notes

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