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Constructing International Relations

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Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ed. *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Nicholas Greenwood Onuf. *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, eds. *Thinking International Relations Differently*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

International Relations (IR) has created for itself distinct and oftentimes impermeable boundaries: states are the main actors, survival is their goal, and self-help is the system they operate in. Moreover, what constitutes real, meaningful, or significant knowledge in IR has been dependent on a methodology with a positivist inclination. The result of these ontological and epistemological commitments is a view of international life that privileges certain groups over others. Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney's *Thinking International Relations Differently* provides a picture of international relations from the perspective of the non-Western world, and highlights how knowledge about the "international" is produced and reproduced in what are considered the peripheries of IR. The picture they and the contributors in the volume paint, however, is one characterized by asymmetric relationships and structures of domination and subordination, and – due to the lack of critical engagement with theory – one that seems to promise incremental but nonetheless minimal change. Explaining, understanding, and overcoming these structures are what Nicholas Greenwood Onuf and Rebecca Adler-Nissen offer in the reissued *World of Our Making* and the edited volume on *Bourdieu in International Relations*, respectively.

Thinking International Relations Differently is the second book in the "Worlding Beyond the West" series. Similar to its predecessor, this volume explores international life outside the core and thereby exposes "the provincialism of (Western) IR… (3)." The book revolves around five main themes: "security," "state, sovereignty and authority," "globalization," "secularism and religion," and "the international." In examining how notions of security are different outside the West, Pinar Bilgin looks at the cases of the "Arab world" and Turkey and finds that understandings about security are "differently different" not least because of the various challenges (such as state building and development) that countries in the non-West experience. Meanwhile, Ole Waever offers a summary of the Aberystwyth, Paris, and Copenhagen schools and how they have contributed to our extant understandings of international relations. Liu Yongtao traces the evolution of Chinese thinking about security over the last thirty years, while Arlene B. Tickner and Monica Herz move the discussion to Latin America and posit that security knowledge in the region is "practical, applied and policy relevant (92)."

Part two of Tickner and Blaney's volume identifies the theme "state, sovereignty and authority." Under this umbrella, Siba Grovogui highlights that Africa has been marginalized in studies of politics, primarily due to the ambivalence and ambiguities surrounding issues like

slavery and colonialism, as well as the role and impact of American thinking in the discipline. At the same time, however, he does not discount the agency of Africa itself: "Africans have been actors of history, even in their own subordination (134)." Similar trajectories are attended to in Siddharth Mallavarapu's chapter on South Asia, who looks at governance issues surrounding the Indian Ocean in the pre-colonial past and the post-colonial present. Fernando Lopez-Alves focuses on the Latin American state and forwards the idea that its development is different from Asia and Africa because it was consolidated during the first wave of globalization (around 1870-1914).

Part three of the volume explores the theme of globalization. Isaac Kamola provides a nuanced take on the issue and deftly asserts that the academic take on globalization is produced by the absence of Africa. To support his claim, he examines three major texts on globalization and thereafter reaches the conclusion that more attention to Africa is not the solution because its very invisibility speaks of how a concept like globalization can only operate if some experiences are privileged over others. Andrei P. Tsygankov's chapter underscores factors that contribute to the "critical" and "defensive" character of Russia's reading of globalization. These include Russia's historical identity, its experiences with economic reforms in the 1990s, and its status as an energy producer today. Arab scholars' take on globalization is Wafaa Hasan and Bessma Momani's purview. They argue that globalization is a complex process that is both beneficial and harmful.

Part four, which centers on secularism and religion, includes Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid's chapter on Southeast Asia and zeroes in specifically on practices in Indonesia and Malaysia. Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Ole Waever call for critical studies on secularism to help improve the ways in which IR can address issues and conflicts relating to religion. Finally, the last part offers understandings of the "international." Karen Smith uses South Africa as a case study and emphasizes the arbitrariness of the line that divides the domestic from the international, while Ayesha Khan describes the experience of a research center in Pakistan and how it shapes knowledge on what is considered local and international.

In its entirety, the main contribution of Tickner and Blaney's volume is its depiction of the multifaceted consequences of the way IR is presently constructed, i.e., state-centric and biased towards the experiences of the so-called core. They present a world that is characterized by a high degree of asymmetry in the capabilities of actors, which thus leads to relations of domination and subordination. However, this domination, they conclude, is so totalizing that the non-Western world is really no different from the West. There is "not enough difference," they point out, despite the infusion of "local flavors" to established disciplinal concepts. This is a provocative claim, and one that Ticker and Blaney have not been able to fully explore in the volume, likely due to the lack of critical engagement with theory. They leave unanswered, for instance, how we can and must account for the so-called differences in the non-Western world, or how power is negotiated between the West and the non-West. Also, where and how does change in their relations enter the picture? An equally important question is how states and non-state actors alike *within* the non-Western world relate to each other. These are important facets that can be explored with recourse to theory. Onuf's reissued *World of Our Making* and Adler-Nissen's edited volume on *Bourdieu in International Relations* offer sophisticated and nuanced theoretical frameworks that can be deployed to explain and understand the dynamics of international relations in both the core and the peripheries.

Onuf's 1989 (reissued 2013) classic piece is the pillar of Critical Constructivism. Similar to the other variants of this school of thought, the ontological foundation of Critical

Constructivism is that social creation is the ongoing co-constitution of actors (agents) and their environments (structures). International relations are a social process: actors interact with each other and negotiate their positions (ideas, interests, and even their own identities). At the same time, these interfaces engender structures. Given the basis for the creation of these structures, they become mutable. Contrary to the notions of, say, Neo-Realism about the permanence and timelessness of the international system, Constructivists share the assumption that change is possible. What makes Onuf's version "critical," however, is the epistemology he enlists. The "linguistic turn," and hence the focus on language, speech acts, and discourses is central to his analysis. Language helps actors create and recreate the rules of their interactions – the rules of the game. Consequently, rules give rise to different types of rule or structures. In short, Onuf's is a three-step paradigm: language, rules, rule.

When actors "speak" or articulate themselves, they engage in speech acts. Speech acts enable an action whose meaning lies in the rules of the utterance. The best example here is saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony. The meaning of the phrase therefore makes sense only to the extent of the practices and the rules surrounding that particular context. Uttering the same phrase in a different context (such as saying "I do" while in a, say, fishing expedition) gives a totally new meaning to it. When actors exchange speech acts in the course of their interaction, the cluster of speech acts are known as "language games," following Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy. In Onuf's analysis, speech acts can be clustered into three: assertives, directives, and commissives. Expressions of assertives include to name, to declare, or to inform. Directives are usually identified through articulations such as to request, to order, or to command. Commissives, meanwhile, embrace utterances that promise, commit, or oblige someone to do something. Speech acts and the ensuing language games are powerful because, as Onuf argues, they can be used to represent and perform deeds. Crucial here, however, is the claim that the meaning of a speech act or the clout of a language game is determined by looking at the underlying rules. Rules are what give and constitute meaning to what we say and do.

In order to identify the rules of the game, we need to go back to the clusters of speech acts. Each cluster, according to Onuf, corresponds to a category of rules. Hence, assertive speech acts follow instruction-rules, directives follow directive-rules, and commissives follow commitment-rules. Instruction-rules make assertions or offer instructions about particular states of affairs. Directive-rules issue orders and specify consequences for disobeying the rules. Commitment-rules specify rights and duties that commit speakers to a future course of action.

It has been previously mentioned that Onuf's Critical Constructivist framework offers a three-step paradigm, that which involves language, rules, and rule. As each speech act cluster has a corresponding category of rules, so too do they have correlating types of rule. Assertives and instruction-rules produce a hegemonic rule. Directives and directive-rules produce hierarchy. Commissives and commitment-rules generate heteronomy. In this sense, language is at the heart of Onuf's analysis because none of the three types of rule would hold if language games were absent. Some definitions and parameters are necessary to capture Onuf's perspective. Hegemony in IR depicts the relationship between a major power and its subordinates, similar to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early Cold War era. Here, the major power redefines social reality through regimes, and subordinates consent to such a rule. Hierarchy is best seen in how a bureaucracy works where directives and orders flow from a higher officer to the one below. Hierarchy in IR highlights asymmetry in power relations and the threat or the use of force or intervention in order to effectuate the dominant power's rule. Heteronomy, meanwhile, takes place when actors enter into agreements and realize that their

maneuverability is compromised because of those commitments. A historical example of such includes lord-serf relations: serfs needed the physical security that only lords could provide, so they entered into agreements with them on the latter's terms.

Onuf's thesis is simply that the world is our making (hence, *World of Our Making*). Our words, our deeds, our acts create the rules, relationships, and structures we find ourselves in. Logically, it follows that we can also re-make (or even un-make) the worlds we have built. Change, thus, is incorporated and embedded in the framework. Still, this begs several questions. First, what of the motive of the actor? Are actors conscious of the type of rule they are creating when they enunciate a speech act? Does the motive matter? Second, and in the same vein, whose language games matter? Which actor gets privileged (and how and why) in any analysis? Finally, what happens in the presence of multiple clusters of language games? Would they result in overlapping types of rule, e.g., hegemony on top of hierarchy alongside heteronomy? These notwithstanding, Onuf's contribution to scholarship cannot be discounted. His framework can help account for the asymmetric relationship between the West and the non-West, as well as identify the possible areas where transformation can occur.

Bourdieu's philosophy can likewise aid in our understanding of the dominance of Western-oriented conceptualizations of IR in the non-Western world. Here, Adler-Nissen's edited volume is thus a welcome addition to the efforts that push the limits of the discipline. Not unlike Onuf's thrust, Bourdieusian thinking sheds light on activities, transactions, and actors that are beyond the usual purview of International Relations. His philosophy puts the spotlight on "how people create international relations in their daily activities (1)." Hence, everyday practices are central in the prompting of symbolic structures.

Vincent Pouliot and Frederic Merand's chapter provides the conceptual focus of the volume and explicate the theoretical framework that the rest of the contributors use in their respective empirical chapters. Pouliot and Merand point out that "the world according to Bourdieu is one where our familiar metaphysical dualisms dissolve (26)." This is aligned with the reflexive epistemology that Bourdieusian philosophy subscribes to, which entails "turning reason against itself (27)." This is aimed at historicizing and relativizing (scientific) reason: "Rather than viewing science as a collection of transcendent truths as with the positivist tradition, it forces the researcher to recognize that rational scientific criteria are themselves a product of an intellectual history, rather than a primordial essence (28-29)." In this sense, Bourdieusian philosophy and Onuf's worldview are similar as both see social processes at work.

Unlike Onuf, however, the ontological foundations of Bourdieusian thought rest on the notions of habitus and field. The habitus consists of the historical experiences of individuals, which influence and contribute to their dispositions and positions in the field. The field then is the objective component of Bourdieu's relational ontology: it is a social space structured along the axes of power relations, objects of struggle, and taken-for-granted knowledge or doxa. In short, Bourdieu's theory is a theory of practice since "actors act based on the dispositions that have been crafted over time (habitus) which, at the point of intersect with their socially defined positions (in the field), are actualized in the form of practices (31)." These practices can be teased out and analyzed systematically through the use, according to Pouliot's chapter on methodology, of "mixed methods (45)." Research strategies involve getting access to practices through interviews and textual analyses, reconstructing the dispositional logic, and constructing the positional logic. Multiple fields in international relations, each being a "vector of power (33)," foment the inevitability and ubiquity of social domination. This is what Bourdieu calls "symbolic power." Trine Villumsen Berling highlights this issue in particular, especially in light

of how the discipline of IR engages in a particular production of knowledge at the expense of other practically generated knowledge.

With the conceptual framework clearly elucidated, the remaining chapters in the volume shift the focus to its application. With each chapter touching on a concept in IR (power, strategy, security, culture, gender, norms, sovereignty, integration, and citizenship), Adler-Nissen's book demonstrates how Bourdieu's sociological imagination can help redefine the way we study international relations. Stefano Guzzini deploys Bourdieu's framework of power analysis and underscores its relational quality between the powerful and the powerless. Frederic Merand and Amelie Forget see strategy as a category of practice inclined towards domination and winning "social wars (97)." Didier Bigo attends to security and utilizes a relational approach to unmask the practices that led to arbitrary choices borne of categorizing facts, people, and knowledge as a danger, a risk, or a threat. This then deconstructs the meaning of security and discloses its historicity. In examining culture, Michael C. Williams finds that it is about the "production of belief" or the recognition of the legitimacy and acceptability of some principles over others. Vivienne Jabri uses the topic of gender to demonstrate how structures of domination are at the same time sites of resistance and contestation. Charlotte Epstein employs the structural power of norms in the international politics of whaling. She argues that norms are organizing principles in a field and identifies what actions may and may not be taken within it. In this sense, norms serve as a source of symbolic power and domination. Against this backdrop, she finds that "the struggle for recognition is not a struggle to be able to continue whaling but rather to be re-included on the side of those who draw the lines (175)." Along the same lines, Rebecca Adler-Nissen's analysis centers on the way the concept of sovereignty is used to ensure symbolic power. Dissecting sovereignty requires focusing on the various agencies and bureaucracies and people, such as the EU's new diplomatic service, that run a state. Also, distinct from the traditional analyses on integration, Niilo Kauppi advocates looking at the role of individuals in the European Parliament in their capacities as rapporteurs or as members of political groups or committees. In this way, human agency is centered in institutional dynamics. Finally, Virginie Guiraudon urges IR scholars to expand the objects of research they take on and to look at issues of "low politics" like citizenship. These issues entail tackling the everyday realities of migrants and dual nationals.

Bourdieu referred to himself as a Structural Constructivist, given the emphasis he placed on symbolic power in the field. A question arises, however, as to how fields change. Can they be transformed at all? Looking at the habitus and multiple fields may help ground analyses of domination, but how can relationships like this be overcome? Granted, these questions are beyond the scope of the present volume. As it stands, nonetheless, the book showcases a solid and balanced offering of both theoretical and empirical contributions.

In sum, the works of Tickner and Blaney, Onuf, and Adler-Nissen provide IR scholars with a view of international life beyond the usual geographies and frameworks. All three emphasize the need to question – and contest – the seemingly impermeable borders of the discipline. They complement each other in the sense that Tickner and Blaney's volume can benefit more with an engagement with theories that either Onuf or Adler-Nissen can provide. They further demonstrate that there is really is a world beyond the strict confines of established IR.