FROM THE MARGINS INTO THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND: ADDRESSING RACE, RACISM, AND EPISTEMIC JUSTICE WITHIN IR

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the questions of race and racism within the discipline of International Relations (IR). I start from the paradox I witness: the discipline that preoccupies itself with global power structures does not speak of racism often. The mainstream IR of today reproduces some of its foundational colonial premises yet does not resort to racism and racialized inequalities as an analytical prism. I unpack the problem through two levels: I look at the lack of diversity at the "people-level" of the discipline and examine the so-called "myth reproduction" at the "theory-level" of IR. I turn to the IR classroom as a possible site of challenge and change. I ask: how can the IR classroom become a site of anti-racist pedagogical practice? I introduce the concept of epistemic justice. Relying on the method of relational interviewing, I bring in five conversations – interviews with two IR professors who address race and racism in class discussions, as well as with two current PhD students and one former student activist who have carried their demands for change, diversity, and justice outside the classroom. My conversations with professors illustrate the strategies of bringing about change in the classroom space. My conversations with current/former students call for action. I navigate them through the trio of "critique, diversify, and re-story." Autoethnographic and narrative dimensions of IR influence my writing.

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Preface

I come from Perm – a city in the Urals region of Russia, where the word "race" was seldom uttered and almost never seen. I do not recall my teachers ever mentioning race or racism at the elementary, middle, or high school. The context of World War II – discussed at length during history lessons all over the nation – might have invited occasional ruminations on the Holocaust yet was most often wrapped in the heroism of the Soviet army. I spent my undergraduate years at Smolny College, St. Petersburg State University, where I first took the "Introduction into International Relations" course: we did not stop to examine the phenomenon of colonialism. We never discussed post-colonial scholarship at any class on International Relations I took throughout my four years there. We never discussed race.

My encounter with the world, seen through the damage of colonialism, occurred at CEU only. The new perspectives at an angle so unfamiliar did not overwhelm but embraced me gently. The writing of Frantz Fanon, however, left a particularly unsettling mark, pushing me to question the place of race in IR further. My IR classroom discussions did not omit the damage of colonialism and racism. On the contrary, many sessions were grounded in those. My IR professors encouraged us to surpass boundaries in our thinking and speaking. My fellow students were active in crossing those boundaries – I always found their thoughts and contributions uniquely valuable. It is thanks to them that I am undertaking the task of writing on race in IR. With an eagerness to discover, I am learning as I write.

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Introduction

The class that moved me was a disruptive one. It challenged the traditional professor-student setting and amplified the students' voices. I could sense something in me was shifting soon after the first semester started. One day during the second week of October 2020, I found myself reading long into the night, having decided to stoically go through Oded Löwenheim's piece "The 'I' in IR: An Autoethnographic Account." As a rule, by midnight, I would be unbearably tired; by one in the morning, I would find it difficult to blink and think straight. With Löwenheim's writing, however, I was wide-awake, glued to the screen, perusing the lines of his thinking. Something sparked. The next day, Himadeep Muppidi's piece "Shame and Rage" brought me to tears. I immediately reached out to my professor, saying,

"I am stepping on something in IR that is moving me peculiarly, but I am struggling to determine what that is. I think journaling through the course– the practice you offered us a while ago – can help uncover it."

While Löwenheim embraced the "I" on his path to and within the academic IR, Muppidi narrated the injustice he witnessed, letting his emotions run loose. Both authors dived into the deeply personal– something the academia does not offer frequently. I could not yet pin down the questions I was chasing at the time. I started my journal. All through the twelve weeks, I navigated my responses to the class material through writing: they would mix the deeply personal with my thoughts on the everyday politics and the discipline. Journaling through the class, where, with the professor's guidance, we nurtured a learning community, was eye-opening. "I am still on my way to fully understand what moves me to the questions I cannot properly formulate yet," I wrote in my first journal entry, "However, I do know what I hope to do one day: I want to challenge."

By pushing me to explore the unconventional realm of the discipline, the classroom challenged me first. A disconnect – a gap – emerged on the surface. The summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests shook me to the core: I witnessed the outrage spilling across the world with loud calls for a halt to police violence and racism heard in various languages from various countries. A backlash followed. Today, yet again, white supremacy sentiments and violent racially motivated attacks are on the rise. There is a tightening grip on those ideas and concepts that bring light on perverted, racialized constructions of power. Race scholar Ali Rattansi notes in his recent book on racism, "In no other time since the defeat of the Nazis have public racist proclamations and violent racist acts been more on the move from the margins to the mainstream, in many parts of the Global North and Global South."[1] I could see clearly: the world is in need of racial reckoning, and it has been for centuries. Yet I could not see IR addressing that need.

How come the discipline that preoccupies itself with the world and global power structures does not speak of racism often? As I chase the paradox, the idiom of "hiding in plain sight" becomes the leitmotif of my research. The scholars who lead me in this study of racism in the IR discipline tend to turn to the idiom, meaning they explore something that is unseen but remains unabashedly visible. In a "hidden in plain sight" setting, there is a presence of masking, or, rather, an intention within those who seek not to see. Racialized nature of global politics, despite its firm presence, escapes central debates, and race within IR remains on the margins. Critical IR scholars – Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam,[2]

[1] Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020), xxiv.
[2] Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam, *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London: Routledge, 2014), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315857299.

Roxanne Doty,[3] Errol Henderson,[4] Randolph Persaud and R. B. J. Walker,[5] Robert Vitalis,[6] as well as many others – expose mainstream IR silence on race. They show how IR grounds itself in imperialism, colonialism, and, eventually, racism.

The class that moved me was a disruptive one, as it carefully fostered a space for a shift in perspectives. "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy,"[7] writes bell hooks on education and politics. In her book "Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom," she unpacks the power of pedagogy – that very academic dimension that is often pushed aside when it comes to the transforming potential of the university. Bell hooks, however, leads her reader through a close look at the classroom as a space that can nourish critique and change; to her, that space is "the one place in the academy where [she] could have the most impact."[8] With the guidance of bell hooks, I argue the critical teaching and learning dimensions of IR carry on the promise of alternative understandings and address the omissions of the discipline's mainstream.

Hence, I ask: *How can the IR classroom become a site of anti-racist pedagogical practice?* Such a practice would bridge the urgency of everyday politics with the discipline's concepts and theories. I start my study by sketching out the current state of IR with regard to the questions of race and racism. After tracing the discipline's history to the roots of colonialism, I look at the problem through two levels. At the so-called "people-level," the voices of people of color are lacking. Diversity is scarce at the "theory-level" as well, where,

[3] Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'The Bounds of "Race" in International Relations', *Millennium* 22, no. 3 (1 December 1993): 443–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298930220031001.
[4] Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1 March 2013): 71–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.710585.
[5] Randolph B. Persaud and R. B. J. Walker, 'Apertura: Race in International Relations', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26, no. 4 (2001): 373–76.
[6] Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations, White World Order, Black Power Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501701887.
[7] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 12.
[8] hooks, 205.

as I continue to unpack the problem, I come to see how the mainstream IR schools and concepts continue to reproduce the discipline's colonial premises. For the IR classroom to become a site of anti-racist pedagogical practice, however, exposing the colonial foundations of the discipline might not be enough.

I introduce my reader to the notion of epistemic justice. Through it, I examine the classroom as a location of radical thought – the teaching and learning that surpass the rigid boundaries, which push race, racialized hierarchies and global inequalities to the margins and footnotes. I turn to those IR professors who address race and racism in class discussions. I also turn to those students who carry their demands for change outside the classroom. Relational interviewing is my method and guide.[9] Yet my study also bears the influence of autoethnographic and narrative dimensions of IR.

I am resorting to the method of autoethnography in fragments. With that, I attempt to opt out of the "authoritative style of writing"[10] and bring the presence of "I" in. Resorting to fragmentary autoethnography, I am drawing from my positionality at intersections: as both a student and a researcher, as both an academic IR "insider" and an observer of everyday politics outside of it. Following Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee, who reflect on the narrative writing in IR as a "call for the reader's intervention,"[11] I choose to narrate my conversations with students. I invite my reader to engage with the students' stories and visions actively.

[9] Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 73–90, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203756065.
[10] Oded Löwenheim, 'The "I" in IR: An Autoethnographic Account', *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 4 (October 2010): 1024, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000562.
[11] Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'Narrative and the Possibilities for Scholarship', *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 2 (1 June 2018): 135, https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olx029.

Chapter 1. The Problem: Race and Racism on the Margins of IR

"What is IR?" my friend asked me recently in a deeply personal conversation on war and the discipline. The response I gave shocked me. I said only, "I don't know," repeatedly, with long pauses of thinking. Two years ago, I would have given a perfect answer, tailored to the IR I knew back then. Perhaps, I would have put together a sentence on nations and power – yet a sentence devoid of critical reflexivity. For my undergraduate "Introduction into IR" exam, I recited the basics of Realism and Liberalism, with Marxism and Constructivism lingering on the sides of the exam questions. "Presently, I am genuinely outraged," I wrote in my first CEU semester journal entry titled "Meeting post-colonialism." The outrage came in response to the four years in a liberal arts institution that had failed to introduce me to the urgent, burning questions of global coloniality.

I turned to Frantz Fanon. His wording was pounding. "My true wish," he wrote, "is to get my brother black or white, to shake off the dust from the lamentable livery built up over centuries of incomprehension."[12] Exploring the centuries-old damage done by colonialism, Fanon looked further, staying vigilant, while foretelling, "the prognosis is in the hands of those who are prepared to shake the worm-eaten foundations of the edifice."[13] "The Black Skin, White Masks" was first published in 1952. Some of the colonial structures of power – the multiple worm-eaten edifices – are in decay today, yet some are still prospering. Both require exposure. The IR discipline has been doing that work – the initial remedy that stems from exposing and critically indicting. The work, however, applies the remedy slowly and stays in the discipline's critical realm.

[12] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xvi.
[13] Fanon, xv.

1.1 The Discipline's Foundations in Colonialism

The IR discipline was born at the soaring high time of colonialism. The emerging concepts of the international laid foundational grounds for the IR as a social science before and during World War I.[14] The world that IR was making sense of at the time stood on "the very success of the European, but especially British, imperial project."[15] The imperial racism reigned the "interracial"[16] relations: the notion of empire drew distinct separation lines between the "civilized" West and those "inferior" non-white populations of the colonies.[17] The eugenics movement fueled the imperial reign. The so-called "social Darwinism"[18] that fostered the movement and Herbert Spencer's infamous "survival of the fittest" statement gave warrant to the claim that the technological and intellectual "progress" of the world's whites proved their inherent superiority.[19] The eugenics movement for "racial hygiene" later culminated with the Holocaust.[20]

Putting a disciplinary paradox into a question, Robbie Shilliam asks, "Why is it that the non-Western world has been a defining presence for IR scholarship and yet said scholarship has consistently balked at placing non-Western thought at the heart of its debates?"[21] The context of imperialism and global racism at the birth of IR nurtured the discipline. As colonialism formed "meta-racialized identities,"[22] intellectual recognition (or non-recognition) followed the placing of those identities. To Gerard Aching, "The international political and

[14] Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., 'International Relations up to 1919: Laying the Foundations', in *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 33–66, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108647670.003.
[15] Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 27.
[16] Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder: Westview, 1988).
[17] Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 27.
[18] Rattansi, 29.
[19] Rattansi, 29.
[20] Rattansi, 30.
[21] Robbie Shilliam, 'Non-Western Thought and International Relations', in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.
[22] Robbie Shilliam, 'The Perilous but Unavoidable Terrain of the Non-West', in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2010), 14.

legal order was thus split into two patterns whose purposes – toleration and civilization – were (and are) frequently at odds."[23] The split, where race was a defining presence, laid grounds for world order visions through theoretical accounts.

The early IR scholarship justified the imperial status quo. Errol Henderson interrogates "An Introduction to the Study of International Relations" by PH Kerr from 1916,[24] Franklin Giddings's "Imperialism?" of 1898,[25] and "World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century" by Paul Reinsch from 1900.[26] All three speak of racial hierarchies directly. Those early writings divided the world into the "civilized" and the "barbarian" to account for colonization and colonialism,[27] spoke of the necessity for the "civilized" to govern the "lesser" races[28] and of the imperial states' "exploitation of undeveloped and inferior races."[29] The early IR scholarship justified racism.

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."[30] The scholar unpacked the phenomena of war, racism, and imperialism in his work. Du Bois's "The African Roots of the War" forwarded the argument that World War I broke out due to the Western states' growing appetite in "pursuit of racist and economic domination of Africa and Asia."[31] Global racialized hierarchy was

[23] Gerard Aching, 'On Colonial Modernity: Civilization versus Sovereignty in Cuba, c. 1840', in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2010), 34.
[24] PH Kerr, 'Political Relations between Advanced and Backward Peoples', in *An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Macmillan and Company, limited, 1916).
[25] Franklin H. Giddings, 'Imperialism?', *Political Science Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1898): 585–605, https://doi.org/10.2307/2139974.
[26] Paul Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1900).
[27] Kerr, 'Political Relations between Advanced and Backward Peoples', 163.
[28] Giddings, 'Imperialism?', 600.
[29] Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, 14.
[30] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk / W.E.B. Du Bois ; Supplementary Material Written by Norman Harris*, Enriched Classic (Pocket Books, 2005), 18.
[31] Errol A. Henderson, 'The Revolution Will Not Be Theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's Challenge to White Supremacist IR Theory', *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (1 June 2017): 501, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829817694246.

central to Du Bois's scholarship on the international.[32] Yet, the scholar's poignant analysis at the height of colonialism did not earn him a place at the IR canon.

Reading Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk" is to encounter the distinct presence of the "I." His metaphorical abundance is disarming. "I have stepped within the Veil," he wrote, "raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses."[33] Du Bois spoke from a place uniquely prescient. He asked, piercing the reader's conscience, "How does it feel to be the problem?"[34] Du Bois became the first African American to receive a doctoral degree at Harvard University.[35] He also contributed to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.[36] The IR discipline was being shaped at the time of his life and work; born out of global white supremacy, the discipline was and remains quite white, lacking the voices of people of color.

1.2 Lack of Diversity and Myth Reproduction

If one examines who teaches at IR departments and who publishes in IR journals, a monolithic composition becomes evident at different "people-levels" of the discipline. Indicting the American IR of "whiteness" in his book "White World Order, Black Power Politics," Robert Vitalis argues those who lead introductory IR classes fall into a "reliable generalization,"[37] most likely identifying as white.[38] Overwhelmingly and quite outrageously, people of color are missing in the institutions that teach IR.[39] Figures confirm that: in the United

[32] Henderson, 501–2.
[33] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk / W.E.B. Du Bois ; Supplementary Material Written by Norman Harris*, 4.
[34] Du Bois, 6.
[35] Norman Harris, 'Introduction', in *The Souls of Black Folk / W.E.B. Du Bois ; Supplementary Material Written by Norman Harris*, Enriched Classic (New York: Pocket Books, 2005), ix.
[36] Harris, x.
[37] Robert Vitalis, 'Introduction: A Mongrel American Social Science', in *White World Order, Black Power Politics*, 1st ed., The Birth of American International Relations (Cornell University Press, 2015), 6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt20fw654.5.
[38] Vitalis, 6.
[39] Julia Carreiro Rolim, 'A Review of Critical Race Theory's Critiques of Mainstream IR', *E-International Relations* (blog), 20 March 2021, accessed April 18, 2022, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/03/20/undoing-the-creation-myth-of-contemporary-international-relations-a-review-of-critical-race-theorys-critiques-of-mainstream-ir/.

States – "the largest producer of IR scholarship"[40] – only 3.4 percent of scholars whose primary field is International Politics identify as Black, Afro-Caribbean or African American, while 4.47 percent identify as Latino or Hispanic American.[41] Diverse voices do not intervene into the mainstream IR monolith frequently. The discipline's people composition remains unequal, and structural barriers to diversity prevail.

David A. Lake offers a testament to the discipline's whiteness from the perspective of "a privileged white male."[42] Arguing that "our personal background and experiences inevitably color the questions we ask,"[43] Lake points to the IR apparatus of reproducing inequality within the field. The "gatekeepers"[44] of the discipline – the white and male scholars in their majority – hold positions of power: remaining in charge of either an IR journal or a university department, they undertake decisions that adhere to their academic knowledge and intuitions influenced by their background and experiences.[45] Thus, the authoritative decisions stay in line with what the white male scholar finds relevant: the non-diverse IR breeds the white man's IR further. [46] As a result, the relevance of the discipline's mainstream theories conforms to what the white male majority deems pertinent.

The (White and Eurocentric) IR canon does not examine the discipline's foundational racialized axis. If the "R-word"[47] – questions of race and racism – was markedly present in IR in the first half of the twentieth century, World War II marked a point of significant change.

[40] Kelebogile Zvobgo and Meredith Loken, 'Why Race Matters in International Relations', *Foreign Policy*, 19 June 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/19/why-race-matters-international-relations-ir/.
[41] 'APSA Membership', American Political Science Association (APSA), February 2020, https://www.apsanet.org/.
[42] David A. Lake, 'White Man's IR: An Intellectual Confession', *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 4 (December 2016): 1112, https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271600308X.
[43] Lake, 1112.
[44] Lake, 1116.
[45] Lake, 1116.
[46] Lake, 1116.
[47] Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, 'From the Everyday to IR: In Defence of the Strategic Use of the R-Word', *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 2 (2 April 2016): 192, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2016.1254016.

Henderson argues IR pursued the strategy of disengagement from the notion of race.[48] That disengagement, however, was superficial. The global racial status quo remained in place.[49] In the light of the anti-colonial movement, scholarly IR work challenged that post-war disengagement and brought the notions of race and racism to the center of the argument.[50] Yet, according to Roxanne Doty, such challenges did not make their way into the IR mainstream.[51] To Randolph Persaud and R. B. J. Walker, "race has been given the epistemological status of silence"[52] within the discipline. Omitting the R-word from analytical lenses continuously, the IR mainstream does not approach racism as a prism to make sense of the world.[53]

Vitalis argues two "myths of empire"[54] inhabit the discipline and require exposure. One stems from the IR of America and/or America-centered IR, and tells us the U.S. international politics do not lead – and, importantly, never led – to stating that it was and is an imperial actor.[55] The other myth deals with the discipline and imperialism rather broadly: it claims IR never undertook profound scholarly engagement with the notion of empire.[56] The former can be dismantled quite effortlessly: the U.S. international affairs legacy, present global status and continuous politics of intervention pile up the evidence. The latter myth, however, demands a closer interrogation of what hides behind the shield of the mainstream IR schools that avoid the notions of race and racism. In the meantime, more myths come to the surface.

The theoretical consensus within IR crosses international borders, as the "big three"[57] schools prevail: for an IR student, to meet Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism often

[48] Henderson, 'Hidden in Plain Sight', 76.
[49] Henderson, 76.
[50] Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'The Bounds of "Race" in International Relations', *Millennium* 22, no. 3 (1 December 1993): 445, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298930220031001.
[51] Doty, 445.
[52] Randolph B. Persaud and R. B. J. Walker, 'Apertura: Race in International Relations', *Alternatives* 26, no. 4 (1 October 2001): 374, https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540102600401.
[53] Rutazibwa, 'From the Everyday to IR', 193.
[54] Vitalis, 'Introduction', 7.
[55] Vitalis, 7.
[56] Vitalis, 7.
[57] Carreiro Rolim, 'A Review of Critical Race Theory's Critiques of Mainstream IR'.

equates with meeting the "basics" of the discipline. Even though all three schools vary on many theoretical grounds, they share a certain conceptual resemblance. All three examine anarchy.[58] Henderson unpacks the concept of anarchy along with the notion of a social contract and argues the way both terms are built hides a racialized hierarchy.[59] That logic goes back to the reign of imperialism when the IR discipline was born. [60] Its damage lands in the regional IR studies today: the analyses that a variety of African politics receive are conducted through the contrasting western visions of "progress."[61] Failing to expose the imperial logic, the discipline's mainstream reproduces it to this day.

Indicting the political theory – that shapes and forms the IR conceptual basis – of ignoring racism and white supremacy in his famous 1997 publication, Charles W. Mills challenges the ubiquitous social contract tradition and forwards the concept of "the Racial Contract."[62] He examines the "unnamed political system"[63] of white supremacy. Mills argues his revision of the social contract concept – a revision that sees race – comes closest to being the world's history and reality.[64] Blindly residing upon "an epistemology of ignorance"[65] of its beneficiaries, the Contract distorts the white vision and understanding of the world.[66] Such distortion contributes to the active mythification of historical facts.

Gurminder K. Bhambra unpacks one IR "myth" often referred to as a historical fact and an event that foregrounded the modern nation-state formation. Bhambra suggests we see the 1648 Peace of Westphalia from a different angle – as an IR tale that, yet again, centralizes the

[58] Carreiro Rolim.
[59] Henderson, 'Hidden in Plain Sight', 88.
[60] Henderson, 88.
[61] Henderson, 88–89.
[62] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).
[63] Mills, 1.
[64] Mills, 19–31.
[65] Mills, 18.
[66] Mills, 18–19.

European powers and their world-ordering role.[67] In "Rethinking Modernity," Bhambra writes what we consider a nation-state today is "wholly endogenous and self-contained within the geo-cultural boundaries of Europe."[68] Such focus misses the European powers' imperial ambitions and their colonial grip. [69] What the classic IR analysis of the Westphalia Peace fails to highlight is blatantly visible in the modern global status quo.

What is IR, then? More importantly, what does it tell us about international politics and power relations? The questions call for critically attuned answers based on the work already done by critical IR scholars – the answers that question the alluring myths. Such questioning might be the initial remedy. As a discipline that lacks diversity in both its individual scholarly composition and the theoretical grounds it rests on, to me, IR epitomizes inequality. The inequalities at the people-level here meet the theory-level lacking diversity as well – the two are inevitably reinforcing each other since the theories studied come to reflect the backgrounds of those who study them.

1.3 A Note on Positionality, Methodology, and Writing

What follows from here onwards requires more transparency on my part. I shall inform my reader: I approach my study out of an "I don't know." The initial discoveries of it drew out an emotionally charged response. This "not knowing," as Elizabeth Dauphinee puts it, "does not require silence. It requires the articulation of that unknowing, and the reasons for that unknowing so that discussion and debate in IR can continue to move in fruitful directions."[70]

[67] Seifudein Adem Gurminder K. Bhambra, Yolande Bouka, Randolph B. Persaud, Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Vineet Thakur, Duncan Bell, Karen Smith, Toni Haastrup, 'Why Is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism?', *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed 3 January 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/03/why-is-mainstream-international-relations-ir-blind-to-racism-colonialism/.
[68] Simon Mussell, 'Review of Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination by Gurminder K. Bhambra', *Sociology* 43, no. 4 (2009): 800–801.
[69] Gurminder K. Bhambra, Yolande Bouka, Randolph B. Persaud, Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Vineet Thakur, Duncan Bell, Karen Smith, Toni Haastrup, 'Why Is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism?'
[70] Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'The Ethics of Autoethnography', *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 2010): 809, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000690.

My path out of the "I don't know" opens an array of knowledge and meaning paths. I navigate those paths by attempting to stay present in the text. My autoethnographic "I" helps to build a relation of my "self" to the matters I question and explore.[71] I strive to continuously reflect on the "self" that is doing the discovering. I do not always succeed.

Unpacking my presence in the text, I find myself at positionality intersections. I am a student through reading and writing. I am a researcher through interviewing and analyzing. The two positions clash. While the former exposes me to continuous learning, the latter – in the conventional understanding of social science research that I had subscribed to for a long time – pushes me to lead, to evaluate, to prescribe. I attempt to resist the latter. I attempt to remain a student. As I keep learning, I am inviting my reader to learn with me. Yet here, the IR lens I have been adjusting as a student of the discipline takes me to another intersection: I remain both within the IR academic space and outside of it. As the knowledge of IR concepts and theories on the one hand informs my vision of the world and everyday politics on the other, I do not always manage to reconcile the two dimensions.

I spoke with two IR professors, two current PhD students in an IR track, and one former student activist who is a theater director now. These five positions I relay in my writing invite a diversity of views. I chose the professors based on their address of race and racism in the classes they teach; I chose the students based on their challenging of the disciplinary, academic inequality and power relations. Four out of five conversations were carried out in Zoom. All of them took place on the terms of anonymity and under a written consent obtained beforehand.

In approaching and talking to the professors and students, I turned to the method of relational interviewing.[72] The interviews served as a channel – they moved my research further. As I traveled along with what I kept discovering, I made space for my flexibility and continuous

[71] Dauphinee, 806.
[72] Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research*.

reflexivity: my preliminary maps – sets of questions crafted anew for each conversation – were changing, and so did my decisions on the mode of writing about the conversations. I start from an interpretivist standpoint: I am interpreting the meanings that the professors have shared with me, maintaining a "teller-focused"[73] approach. My interviews with professors largely play an illustrative role: they contribute to the discussion on bringing about change in the classroom space. Processing those interviews – abundant in care, love of teaching, and distinct recognition of each student in their classes – I approached my other conversations differently, slowly drifting into the narrative mode of writing.

I must admit I followed the drift intuitively. My conversations with PhD students took place separately, yet, working with the transcripts, I could clearly see them speaking to each other. I proceeded with reading the two transcripts jointly, placing the students' thoughts in connection to one another. By weaving through the interviews that way, I created a conversation with the three of us: I merged my questions with the students' answers edited cautiously, aiming to capture their visions that heavily rely upon each other. The narrative drift, however, took me further. Reading the transcript of my interview with a former student activist, I kept asking myself, "What mode of writing could amplify it?" A decision to narrate came. I admit I hold my agency in telling – I narrate what I interpret as necessary.

Narrative IR has been gaining ground. What narratives implicate, as Jessica Da Silva C. De Oliveira sees them, is "the articulation of an ethical-political commitment to shortening the distance […] between scholarly abstract language and the world it tries to speak of/to."[74] Shortening that distance engages both who we write about and who we address through the

[73] Margareta Hydén, 'The Teller-Focused Interview: Interviewing as a Relational Practice', *Qualitative Social Work* 13, no. 6 (1 November 2014): 796, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325013506247.
[74] Jessica da Silva C. de Oliveira, 'Narrative IR, Worldly IR', in *Postcolonial Maghreb and the Limits of IR*, ed. Jessica da Silva C. de Oliveira, Global Political Sociology (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 41, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19985-2_2.

text. It can consequently lead to the formation of a dialogue with the reader.[75] Quite peculiarly, by shortening the distance one can be opening a separate space in writing. I attempt to invite that space of engagement and dialogue in what follows from here.

[75] Ravecca and Dauphinee, 'Narrative and the Possibilities for Scholarship', 132.

Chapter 2. Remedies in Theory and Practice: The Classroom

A shift in IR – a shift from the comfort of myths to seeing "the Other," seeing the damage that scholarly blindness to racism and inequality have caused – might begin in the classroom that both sees and hears the students, reflecting critically on who is present, who is absent, who speaks up and who remains silent. For the shift to occur, however, students need guidance that stems from pedagogical practices committed to bringing about change. In "Teaching to Transgress," bell hooks writes on the liberatory potential such pedagogy might result in,

> "Students are eager to break through barriers to knowing. They are willing to surrender to the wonder of re-learning and learning ways of knowing that go against the grain. When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve."[76]

My exploration of against-the-grain teaching led me to the notion of epistemic justice. The concept came to capture something that had long been floating away from me. I discovered the epistemic injustice/justice dichotomy as it was navigated by a variety of scholars.[77] Yet, I choose to turn to Robbie Shilliam, whose scholarly contributions explore the damage of colonialism and the notion of race within the international realm. I ground my vision of epistemic justice in his work.

Relying on the Black liberal education tradition, Shilliam defines epistemic justice as a call "for a reckoning with the racialized inequalities of knowledge cultivation that have historically accompanied the European colonial project."[78] Shilliam argues the notion of epistemic justice links epistemology with politics. It works against the racialized structure of

[76] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 44.
[77] For instance, Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001.
[78] Robbie Shilliam, 'The Aims and Methods of Liberal Education: Notes from a Nineteenth Century Pan-Africanist', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 29, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 255, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-016-9227-5.

the world's colonial legacy that demarcates "the knowers and the known."[79] To Shilliam, epistemic justice joins the broader demand for reparation of colonial damage.[80] The author suggests we learn from 19th-century Pan-African educator Edward Blyden. Blyden, President of Liberia College at the time, advocated for a non-Eurocentric curriculum, epistemological restoration of "the worth of African peoples,"[81] and an education that connects to one's immediate environment of injustice.[82] These, I argue, are suggestions of remedial nature. If applied to IR, they offer to enhance the discipline.

Education that strives for epistemic justice strives to right the colonial wrongs of knowledge production. A move towards epistemic justice can drive the processes of "*de-mythologizing*, *de-silencing*, and anti-colonially *de-colonizing*"[83] within the discipline. The students I have met throughout my years of studying IR are eager to see change coming about in the discipline that does not always bridge the urgency of currently unfolding politics with the concepts and theories it provides. The notion of epistemic justice promises to connect the two – starting from the classroom and going beyond it. When what is "at stake is indeed the question of racism and epistemology,"[84] the IR curriculum and pedagogical decisions that shape it might welcome radical rethinking. Carving out remedies in both theory and practice, I dedicate this chapter to those IR professors who are attempting to go against the grain.

2.1 Transforming the Curriculum

How does one teach the (White) IR canon without imposing it on the disciplinary worldview of students? In her article that foregrounds the question, "Is IR Theory White?"

[79] Shilliam, 255.
[80] Shilliam, 255.
[81] Shilliam, 258.
[82] Shilliam, 258–62.
[83] Rutazibwa, 'From the Everyday to IR', 192.
[84] Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (1 December 2009): 160, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275.

Meera Sabaratnam examines how "race and Whiteness continue to organize the field."[85] By saying "IR is White,"[86] the author groups together those epistemological standpoints – hidden in a variety of the discipline's sites – that racialize the international.[87] Those standpoints impose a hierarchy – a racialized one, yet not so evidently. Sabaratnam's discourse analysis of three IR mainstream theoretical works –authored by Walz, Keohane, and Wendt – shows how "White subject-positioning"[88] is present in all the three representations of neorealism, neoliberalism, and constructivism.

All three make their way into IR curriculums, and we, IR students, know them quite well. In a conversation organized by CEU within a student-led project, Sabaratnam spoke of her "Decolonizing the University" initiative. I see the initiative as a strategic move towards epistemic justice. "Decolonizing the University" originates out of anti-racist, decolonial thinking and builds upon the critique that the bulk of university knowledge rests on, yet again, a variety of myths about the West and its global role. Sabaratnam stressed tackling that mythology and its damage. Here the curriculum inevitably comes to the fore – the curriculum that invites "a diversity of ideas as well as a diversity of authors and authorial positions."[89] My conversations with IR professors aim at inviting those diversities.

I spoke to two IR professors, whose syllabi make clear-cut stops at the questions of race and racism in more than a single class session. Their approaches differ in a variety of ways – from how the syllabus is coming together to how they encourage students to discuss the scholarly work they assign. Yet both underscore ideas that are critical of the IR mainstream,

[85] Meera Sabaratnam, 'Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts', *Millennium* 49, no. 1 (1 September 2020): 7, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829820971687.
[86] Sabaratnam, 5.
[87] Sabaratnam, 5.
[88] Sabaratnam, 14–15.
[89] Post- university, *Dinner with Alex Astrov and Meera Sabaratnam*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HS7Om4o278g.

heavily relying on postcolonial thought. They both focus on aspects of international security with a sub-focus on the EU foreign and security policies.

One way to bring the questions of race into the IR classroom is by acquainting students with the critical work that sees race. The placement of such work in the syllabi matters. In my conversation with one professor, who teaches a class on power asymmetries, the term "movement" came up with a reference to the critical IR scholarship that "foregrounded race."[90] His study of the movement led him to Fanon. The writings of Fanon – excerpts from "Black Skin, White Masks" and "The Wretched of the Earth" – along with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha made their way into the class curriculum. In fact, the professor starts his class on power with Fanon.

Having observed his students over the years of teaching the course, he notes Fanon becomes a leading reference in the class sessions that follow. "Sometimes, it is not necessarily just the ideas, it is also how the ideas are transported," the professor shared, analyzing why Fanon's work resonated with his students. "His writing is simply extremely powerful and is a merging of the psychological or the existential. Seeing through his own eyes in the form of an autobiography, or autobiographical fragments, and analysis of the broader structural and relational context is simply extremely powerful." Introducing IR students to Fanon, I believe, can move them in a direction that challenges the mainstream of the discipline profoundly.

As the other professor suggested in our conversation, acquainting IR students with critical IR scholarship at the very beginning of their studies can be a strategic decision that aims to show that "international relations theory, as we know it, is just one way of looking at international politics."[91] The professor argued refusing to bring students into IR through the mainstream theoretical canon would be to go against the widespread assumption that the canon

[90] First Interview with an IR Professor, 20 April 2022.
[91] Second Interview with an IR professor, 10 May 2022.

is "the established knowledge"[92] and all the other authors deviate from it. "Let's start from how IR reproduces racist violence and then take it from there,"[93] she proposed.

In my other conversation, the professor, who introduces graduate students to IR theories, believes it is still important to familiarize students with "key ideas and concepts and texts,"[94] referring this way – as I interpret – to the IR canon, with which he starts the course. He later gives students "a flavor of the plurality of voices, epistemologies, and ontologies of world politics,"[95] where feminist scholarship and work that interrogates the questions of race and racism within IR appear. The two partly diverging opinions of the professors I spoke with bring me to the course design of Jonneke Koomen, a professor at Willamette University: she strategically clashes the canon with its challengers.

Koomen's undergraduate introductory course includes the IR canon, yet arranges students' reading of the traditional IR pieces in parallel with the work of Black internationalists.[96] Such joint reading helps Koomen to induce an analysis of the IR mainstream tenets "alongside, through, and against the texts of selected Black internationalist thinkers."[97] By continuously interrogating the canon with seeing how racism and racialized hierarchies have shaped the global affairs, students question the mainstream IR concepts and theories. Koomen's course offers three big thematical knots – "war, institutions, and political economy"[98] – and invites the writings of Du Bois, who takes up the role of the "scholarly

[92] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[93] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[94] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[95] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[96] Jonneke Koomen, 'International Relations/Black Internationalism: Reimagining Teaching and Learning about Global Politics', *International Studies Perspectives* 20, no. 4 (November 2019): 392, https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekz008.
[97] Koomen, 393.
[98] Koomen, 394.

center" in the class, speeches of Haile Selassie and Malcolm X, as well as work of Walter Rodney and Jamaica Kincaid.[99]

2.2 Unpacking an IR Debate on Racism

The discipline's dynamics outside the classroom – in the space of academic journals that nurture controversies – can offer a lot for the classroom to process. As critical IR scholars interrogate the notion of race, they forward long-overdue conversations on the damage done by colonialism. One such recently started conversation left the discipline in a heated debate. In 2020, Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Alison Howell published their article "Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School" in *Security Dialogue*. Three concepts led the authors' argument – "civilizationism,"[100] "methodological whiteness,"[101] and "antiblack racism."[102] All three, according to Richter-Montpetit and Howell, linger on the premises of the securitization theory. Responses to their argument abound to this day.

In my class presentation on the debate last year, I argued the responding publication of Ole Weaver and Barry Buzan – the highly respected representatives of the Copenhagen School and securitization theory architects – failed to construct a conversational bridge that the discipline could have greatly benefitted from. In the response that Weaver and Buzan published in *Security Dialogue* in 2020, a power demarcation takes place. The authors label Richter-Montpetit and Howell as "poor"[103] academics, who resort to "deepfake methodology"[104] to

[99] Koomen, 394–406.
[100] Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Is Securitization Theory Racist? Civilizationism, Methodological Whiteness, and Antiblack Thought in the Copenhagen School', *Security Dialogue* 51, no. 1 (2020): 7, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619862921.
[101] Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 11.
[102] Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 13.
[103] Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, 'Racism and Responsibility – The Critical Limits of Deepfake Methodology in Security Studies: A Reply to Howell and Richter-Montpetit', *Security Dialogue* 51, no. 4 (1 August 2020): 387, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620916153.
[104] Wæver and Buzan, 387.

pose "flawed"[105] arguments, as well as "toxic and outlandish charges."[106] In their response, Weaver and Buzan speak from a place of assumed authority that determines what makes a scholarly work and dismiss the non-conforming scholarship as fallacious.

"I thought it was an interesting teachable moment,"[107] one of the professors I interviewed shared with me. "Controversies are always great teaching material," she added, "I thought this would be good, of course, to teach about race and security, but also to inspire some kinds of sensibility for the struggles that are going on in the discipline."[108] Indeed, classroom analysis of the debate might challenge a canon-formed way of perceiving IR. The professors I spoke with turned to the debate in their classes. They chose to unpack it with additional scholarly interventions.

Even though the two professors approached the debate pedagogically differently, they both admitted the class discussion ended up being quite dispassionate – the opposite of what I experienced having presented on the topic in an IR class the previous year. What one of the professors saw as the debate's teaching potential arrived at prompting her students to evaluate the arguments by asking, "How do you engage with someone's controversial perspectives?"[109] She offered a so-called "mapping exercise" to the class – a visualization technique that helped to assess the arguments of authors against each other. As the professor explained, to "map" also meant to contextualize the arguments onto the power relations at play within IR.

The other professor included the controversy in his classes two years in a row. One was based upon the two initial critique-response pieces – Richter-Montpetit and Howell vs. Weaver and Buzan. It opened the door to emotional responses, as "you feel the hurt coming out of it,

[105] Wæver and Buzan, 386.
[106] Wæver and Buzan, 387.
[107] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[108] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[109] Second Interview with an IR professor.

and that may shape how one reads it."[110] The class was polarized. His following year's decision to replace Weaver and Buzan's response with Sabaratnam's piece "Is IR Theory White?"[111] prompted the class to approach the debate from more "antiseptic"[112] standpoints and with a dose of "fictive distancing."[113] The professor admitted "it was less directly speaking to everyday experiences of students."[114] I follow that with asking: should one be encouraging students to share their experiences? How does one go about it? Critical international pedagogies help to navigate this terrain.

2.3 Critical International Pedagogies

"Hiding in plain sight" – the leitmotif that has been following my study of the questions of race and racism in IR – also accompanies the pedagogical matters of the discipline. As Claire Timperley and Kate Schick argue, IR pedagogical interventions do not receive the value of appropriate measure within the discipline.[115] Representing "the medium through which the majority of academics reach the most people,"[116] pedagogy shapes future IR scholars: it molds their visions of the global politics.[117] Paradoxically, IR quite often ponders upon the "how" of bringing about change yet undervalues the one site most capable of nurturing that change – the IR classroom.

Additions to a syllabus invite more questions, as how one reads the texts matters as much as how one leads (or decides not to lead) a class discussion. An array of critically attuned pedagogical interventions accompanying those curriculum changes I described above offer to turn an IR classroom into a space that nourishes students by teaching differently. Evaluating

[110] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[111] Sabaratnam, 'Is IR Theory White?'
[112] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[113] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[114] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[115] Claire Timperley and Kate Schick, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Pedagogy and Power', *International Studies Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (1 May 2022): 115, https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekab002.
[116] Timperley and Schick, 115.
[117] Timperley and Schick, 115.

the power of critical pedagogy, Timperley and Schick advocate for "embodied and relational"[118] teaching practices that challenge the traditional student-professor power relations.[119] The authors suggest we perceive pedagogy as an ontological – not merely epistemological – endeavor.[120]

The notion of ontological pedagogy appeals to me greatly. As Timperley and Schick describe it, seeing pedagogy from the ontological vantage point empowers us to recognize that teaching shapes "the self and the world, by shaping the way we know, relate, and act."[121] Such a vantage point helps to address the classroom space more holistically, leading us to a recognition of a multiplicity of differences among the ontologies that exist.[122] The questions of privilege and corresponding erasure of non-privileged voices come up. IR reflects the privilege/erasure dichotomy well: Eurocentric viewpoints dominate the classroom space.[123] What comes to the fore is *how* one teaches with careful attention to *who* one teaches. Both professors I interviewed addressed the critical "how" and "who" in teaching – as well as its rewards and challenges.

Acknowledging the critical presence of students helps to shorten the distance between them and the professor by "seeing students and educators as co-learners, welcoming students *as themselves*, and cultivating a willingness to be uncertain, to question and learn from one another."[124] Students' backgrounds and experiences can challenge the dominant voices in both the readings and the classroom space. "I would want as many of these free-wheeling discussions in a class as possible, and as many personal stories coming in as possible,"[125] one

[118] Timperley and Schick, 114.
[119] Timperley and Schick, 117.
[120] Timperley and Schick, 118.
[121] Timperley and Schick, 118.
[122] Timperley and Schick, 118.
[123] Timperley and Schick, 118.
[124] Timperley and Schick, 121.
[125] First Interview with an IR Professor.

of the professors shared with me. He admitted he encouraged his students to share personal stories only at the beginning of the course; students later brought up their experiences themselves.

Diversity of students, of course, bears importance and affects the class discussions greatly. Yet, as the professor pointed out in my first interview, apart from the variety of national and regional backgrounds, academic background diversity challenges IR students to their considerable benefit. In the light of difficulties that occur in such a diverse classroom space, he "would not like to have a class community that is too restrictive an environment and the safe spaces to be too entrenched and too protected so that we can hardly say anything without stepping on someone's toes and that person crying wolf."[126] He admits conflict and diverging opinions still hold relevance. Yet, one "needs to be extremely sensitive and attuned to class dynamics."[127]

The other professor spoke of the classroom as a harbor of highly racialized and gendered practices. Referring to arguments occurring and the resistance that students display to matters discussed in class, she elaborated on the importance of one's acute awareness of the power differentials in class. Only once instances of sexism and racism come to the surface does she intervene from her own power position. In most other cases, the professor prefers to opt for "a committed discussion on, 'What is going on here right now? What are the different perspectives that we are taking on to this?'"[128] The professor later shared that one way to tackle class hierarchies would be to get rid of the participation grade. She admits she sees how that

[126] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[127] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[128] Second Interview with an IR professor.

"privileges white masculinity all the time,"[129] as the classroom space is "being taken up by a particular group of students."[130]

Critical awareness that prevails in as many teaching aspects as possible delivers challenges in abundance, however. Teaching – if one aims to not only go against tradition and status quo but also reverse that tradition and status quo – is a politically charged decision.[131] It is a hard decision to deliver. Instantly, the classroom turns into an exceptionally vulnerable space.[132] It comes down to "trial and error," as both professors admitted to me in our conversations. The pursuit of radical change in the classroom can invite failure, pain, and a myriad of questions on how to go about it.

"I failed. I let it go too far,"[133] one of the professors shared with me. He talked at length about the discussion his class had on the differences in meaning and understanding of the n-word. "And this was painful,"[134] he told me. He realized the presence of pain in the class, having processed the reaction of some students, who displayed feelings of discomfort, anger, and hurt with their movements and facial expressions. Some students withdrew from the discussion. "There are clearly limits for what one can do in the classroom. I've always been a proponent of 'push it as far as possible,' but there is always the risk that one goes too far."[135] The professor emphasized that risk emerges especially in the class discussions on race due to the variety of racial identifications among students. "I immediately afterwards thought I made a mistake."[136]

[129] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[130] Second Interview with an IR professor.
[131] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 203.
[132] Timperley and Schick, 'Hiding in Plain Sight', 1 May 2022, 125.
[133] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[134] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[135] First Interview with an IR Professor.
[136] First Interview with an IR Professor.

"To acknowledge the power and as a teacher also yield the power consciously" is paramount, the other professor told me. She admitted teaching in a diverse classroom proved to be challenging for her. Yet, she proceeded by asking, "How can I as a white woman teach on issues so that the people who are not familiar with it and who might be from the communities that we are talking about here have a more active voice in the classroom?"[137] Questions like this do hide in plain sight for IR professors from a variety of universities. The uncertainty these questions summon can serve as a fruitful incentive to approach the classroom space critically.

To the professors I spoke with, teaching against the grain invites curriculum transformation, inclusion of diverse voices in the reading lists, encouragement of students to draw from their backgrounds and experiences, as well as exposure to radical vulnerability and simultaneous learning from it. When educators approach teaching critically and turn to the issues of inequality in their blatant visibility – within concepts, ideas, and class dynamics – an IR classroom might follow the call of epistemic justice to address the colonial damage and usher change in.

[137] Second Interview with an IR professor.

Chapter 3. Critique, Diversify, Re-story: Engaging with Students' Counter-Conduct

I met the trio of "critique, diversify, and re-story global politics"[138] in the paper I quoted from extensively – authored by Timperley and Schick. The three appeared in passing, aimed at describing what critical pedagogies can aspire to deliver in an IR classroom. The three, however, stayed with me for much longer than they did in the authors' writing. I choose to apply them to my analysis of the interviews with student organizers and activists, as our conversations come to embody the three verbs. They are verbs for good reason: "critique, diversify, and re-story" call for action, just like the current/former students I spoke with do.

As the IR discipline lacks in teaching action, the counter-conduct of frustrated students – frustrated with both the world's social injustices and the academy not responding to those effectively – offers to guide. Action guides. I argue building an IR classroom that moves students' thinking towards epistemic justice – and nurtures anti-racist pedagogical practices through it – stems from critiquing proactively, diversifying extensively, and, ultimately, re-storying the discipline. The students I spoke with are leading such a three-fold endeavor. I dedicate this chapter to them.

3.1 (An)Other Knowledge Student Initiative

"Our students are our greatest allies,"[139] Felice Blake writes in her piece that emphasizes action amid a crisis. In "Why Black Lives Matter in the Humanities," Blake talks of activist students and the role they play within universities – the role that is quite often undervalued. To her, the neoliberal academy with colorblind teaching practices and

[138] Claire Timperley and Kate Schick, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Pedagogy and Power', *International Studies Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (1 May 2022): 114, https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekab002.
[139] Felice Blake, 'Why Black Lives Matter in the Humanities', in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2019), 323, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvcwp0hd.20.

"managerial multiculturalism"[140] fails the students who rebel against injustice. Blake admits she failed her students, too. "I failed them because they did not live up to the requirements set for passing a university course, and I failed them in developing a collective understanding about what counts for knowledge at the university and beyond its walls."[141] Admitting mistakes can serve as a step towards change, Blake acts upon it and questions what we consider knowledge and whether the university has a monopoly on producing it.

I sat down to talk to two PhD students, who launched (An)Other Knowledge initiative and inquired into that exactly – what counts for knowledge within the university and beyond? – by critiquing academic space(s) proactively. To relay the students' voices, I choose to create a conversation in writing. I spoke to each student separately, yet I merge their answers in my writing. The initiative is a collective one: it was born out of their friendship and joint reflection on their intention to build a career within academia. Both PhD students are in the field of IR. They critique and create a platform out of the critique, with careful attention to the issues of inequality, hierarchy, and racialized academic practices, aiming to invite as many diverse voices as possible.

Me: How did the idea for the initiative come about?

PhD student 1[142]: It came from a general frustration. What I shared with some of my friends/colleagues was that it felt like we were preparing ourselves for a career, preparing ourselves for certain skill sets that were given to us and that we ourselves were not part of creating. We were being handed something that did not reflect what we were seeing around us. And things feel exactly like you describe them: they are hiding inequalities that exist within the discipline. We questioned why we were being continually forced into a particular setting

[140] Blake, 317.
[141] Blake, 323.
[142] Second interview with a PhD student, 27 April 2022.

of "you have to be publishing, you have to frame it this way, you have to follow this way of writing your paper, everything should be in English…"

PhD student 2[143]: That was our starting point – a very informal discussion of our grievances about the current state of academia. One of our grievances about the grievances was that everyone criticizes, but no one does anything. We proceeded with asking, can we envision an alternative for knowledge production and an alternative for academia? The word "alternative" played the most crucial role at the beginning. However, we also questioned our visions and highly doubted the problems we identified were universal. We realized we needed a platform, and here another crucial word for us became "space." We wanted to build a space, bring different actors together, trigger and forward this discussion and carry out a debate on power relations, inequalities within academia and knowledge production.

Me: What strategies did you pursue?

PhD student 1: We found ourselves wondering how we could rethink things in a space that gave us an opportunity, i.e., the pandemic. Suddenly, there were a lot more online resources and people interested in online events. On top of that, the pandemic changed who was allowed to participate. I might be getting ahead of myself, but I think what our initiative managed to do best was having a much more diverse participant group at the conference we organized. I saw that at other conferences as well. A lot more people were coming from places that were typically visa-restricted or cost-restricted – a lot more participants from Latin America and from the Middle East. The format helped us stimulate conversations about inequality. Discussions of colonialism and decolonization were also prominent.

[143] First interview with a PhD student, 26 April 2022.

Me: Can I challenge you a little bit? In my view, a conference is a very traditional academic event. How was your conference supposed to become a radical experimental space?

PhD student 2: That is a good question, and in a way, it reveals how limited our vocabulary is. We wanted to break the traditional format, but then, how do you call it?

PhD student 1: We were indeed trying to do something a bit more radical, but at the end of the day, you are constrained to how things are understood by people. You can't produce something new or radical without a signifier that people can connect to.

PhD student 2: We called it a conference. We did try to include some disruptive elements, however, even though they were not all perfect, new, or novel. For example, we wanted to challenge the hegemonic language – English. Due to the limited budget, we carried on based on the languages we had in our organizing team – English, Turkish, and Russian. We circulated the conference call, all the advertisements, tweets, and documents in these three languages. Most importantly, we provided simultaneous interpretation into English, Russian, and Turkish during our events. I personally had some reservations about the idea at the beginning, but you know what? It turned out to be great. It showed us how the audience can be different and diverse in that sense.

PhD student 1: We got a lot of diversity in terms of national origin. We had scholars who agreed to participate precisely because they could speak in their native language. I am a native English speaker, and every day I get to speak my language. Even though my friends whose first language is not English speak it beautifully, I realize I cannot connect to them in the way they connect with me. I remember one moment at an event we organized when the interpreter had not started their work yet and I was listening to the participants and my friend chatting in Turkish. It is going to sound strange, but it felt nice not to be part of the conversation. I thought, for once it was not English and this privilege that had been put on the world for years.

Me: In the conference pitch, there was one sentence that grabbed my attention, "Contributors, please feel free to raze us, academics, to the ground." Did that happen eventually?

PhD student 2: One of our goals was to break the idea that knowledge production should be the monopoly of the university or academia. We wanted to bring in activists, practitioners, artists, and academics together, as opposed to organizing our conference in the classical format, where there is a linear flow of knowledge, or academics are at the center, learning from practitioners. We wanted a diverse audience to come together as equal members and contributors to knowledge production. We failed that. It was still academics criticizing academia or academics criticizing academics. I believe our biggest mistake was how we wrote the call: it still used the language that is written by academics and for academics.

PhD student 1: We did anticipate that, though, because we also understood the limits of how we were phrasing things. Of course, you can think about your limitations and the extent of them abstractly. Then, suddenly, you find yourself in a meeting with three other people, and you are all just wondering, how do artists talk? So, again, most of the participants were academics, and it was exactly "when you point one finger, three fingers point back." I was impressed with some of the ideas coming from Russian- and Turkish-speaking participants. Generally, however, my biggest disappointment was that the conference was full of criticisms. The participants raised very valid points, but it is easier to identify problems. You asked if we managed to raze academics to the ground. We razed them, but we did not raise them back up.

By merging the students' voices, I see how the language aspect unites them. It engenders a strategy that leads the students' critique by bringing diversity in and with that, a multiplicity of stories – re-told, re-imagined. In her chapter "Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words," bell hooks writes on approaching the language critically in the classroom

and invites to "disrupt that cultural imperialism that suggests one is worthy of being heard only if one speaks in standard English."[144] I believe the students I interviewed attempted to forward that disruption precisely. Within their initiative, the language became a challenger and a door that opened a variety of paths not traveled through with the standard academic English. Those paths start conversations on inequality and injustice.

In search of "alternatives," the students' proactive critiques went in different directions. They reflected on what the conference participants delivered by critiquing the lack of action-oriented suggestions. Following that, the students reflected on their own roles by admitting failures, pondering upon them, and actively learning from them. Here language again came to the fore: facing their own linguistic limitations – strained by the academic communicative standards – the students did not manage to attract "non-academic-language speakers" and non-academic knowledge producers.

The premise, however, was to learn from the difference and a reservoir of remedial resources it promises to deliver – in poetry and prose, in fiction and nonfiction – in a myriad of ways we can critique, diversify, and re-story, while dealing with injustice, inequality, and power. Those can enrich the classroom that aims to nurture epistemic justice, radical alternative thinking, and anti-racist practices. "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic,"[145] writes Audre Lorde on the productive role of difference and on the power of difference in fighting injustice. Difference can help to lead one's way towards justice.

[144] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, 174.
[145] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (The Crossing Press, 1984), 111.

3.2 The Rhodes Must Fall: Student, Movement, and Theater

If (An)Other Knowledge is a vigilant quest to challenge the dominant knowledge production discourse through diversity and difference, the second student intervention I turn to is a much more radical endeavor. In it, the students led the movement for epistemic justice. They poured into the streets, they chanted for change, they occupied university spaces. The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement raised demands to decolonize loudly. I am adamant that the story of an RMF protester from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and co-creator of theater play "The Fall" is what IR can learn from. Here the movement takes up the remedial role that the university and classroom spaces had failed to deliver. I choose to narrate the story of the former student I spoke with. I interrupt the narration with excerpts from the theater play that speaks for the movement.

Zarah[146] is a twenty-eight-year-old actress, director, and writer based in the U.K. We met in Zoom.[147] She spoke to me from London. Zarah works for a small theater company that focuses on touring international work. "It is really important for me to give people the opportunity to see the world in a different way, to see different perspectives on things," she shared. Zarah also teaches at a drama university, helping to decolonize the curriculum and bring in work that is, in her words, not "white male Eurocentric." On top of all that, she is creating her own projects. Zarah's personal website describes her interests poignantly, "I have a two-pronged approach to decolonizing the canon," she writes, "on one hand I create new texts through devising, on the other hand I take pre-existing texts and politically occupy them."

Zarah was raised in South Africa. She represents the generation born towards the end or right after the Apartheid. She reflects on growing up and hearing people say, "You are born free! Rainbow nation! Kumbaya! Apartheid is over! You don't have to worry about race

[146] The name used in the text is a pseudonym. My interviewee suggested the name.
[147] Interview with a RMF activist, 11 April 2022.

anymore. We are all equal, the Constitution says so." Yet, to Zarah, that does not hold true. "If you look at the South-African society, it is still a deeply racist society, a deeply segregated society." Witnessing poverty, lack of social mobility, people struggling, and "living hand to mouth," Zarah laments nothing had been fixed. She graduated from the UCT in the midst of the RMF protests when multiple injustices were being voiced by students around her.

> *The police started warning us and hitting us with their riot shields. […] I remember a police officer telling a white girl that they didn't want to harm them, and I thought […], this is a South Africa Nelson Mandela dreamt of, where blacks and whites protest together, but nothing has changed!*[148]

The RMF movement allowed Zarah to see inequality clearly; it gave her the language to process and express something she had been feeling for a long time but could not pin down and wrap in words. "I felt something weird," she shared, "about being at university, having my accent corrected, always doing English plays, and just wondering, oh why am I never doing plays with people that look like me?" Zarah recalled she took a class on English literature during her first year at UCT, and "it was all white men;" only two black writers – a British one and an African one – made their way into the syllabus. Zarah says she did not have the vocabulary to explain how she felt about it. Students would rarely bring up race questions in class. That changed after she attended the first RMF protest. Suddenly, Zarah's sentiments met a distinct explanation – institutionalized racism.

> *Cecil John Rhodes – I learnt about him in my second-year African history course. It was then that I realized that the history we were learning was not the history of Africa but rather the history of how Britain and the Western powers stole Africa and covered it up into little countries […] And they say he donated this land to the University, but whose land was it to begin with?*[149]

To media outlets, the RMF student movement started with an activist throwing feces on the statue of Cecil Rhodes – a British imperialist and colonial mining magnate. Zarah points out that such a performative action brought focus to the statue, yet the process of questioning

[148] Al Jazeera English, *Excerpt 4 of 'The Fall' Performed at 'Who Are the Activists behind the #RhodesMustFall Movement? | The Stream'*, 2018, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5lXhlOpOA4.
[149] Al Jazeera English, *Excerpt 1 of 'The Fall' Performed at 'Who Are the Activists behind the #RhodesMustFall Movement? | The Stream'*, 2018, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5lXhlOpOA4.

the university's legacy and its symbolism had started earlier. Zarah says the statue, however, had never been targeted specifically before and remained an "icon" for the UCT, "We still allowed this man and his ideology to sit front and center and to be the image of our university – of an African university in Africa."

> *When our comrade Chumani threw human excrement on the statue of Rhodes, he was at a loss for words about how crap it is for university students at this university. […] It's amazing really how so many people got lit about some poo on a statue, but some very hard work was going on around transformation long before he did that.*[150]

When asked about the student composition of the movement, Zarah gave an outright answer: it was not racially diverse. The protesters and activists were mostly people of color – "lots of women of color," Zarah emphasized – queer people, trans- and non-binary people. They led the movement and played the role of, as Zarah describes it, "thought-creators" and "thought-leaders" continuously organizing lectures and workshops around the RMF. During the movement, the student protesters experienced a backlash from both some of their white classmates and professors – from racist hate mail to targeted microaggressions in class. Zarah, however, stressed that her department – the drama department – was supportive of the activism. "There was one day when the Head of Theatre Making sat us down and gave us a rundown of how to stay safe at protests," Zarah mentioned, adding, "which I thought was absolutely incredible."

> *Rhodes falls, the world stops. History is suspended in the air and continues to wash over us like a salty healing wave.*[151]

The Rhodes statue fell exactly a month after the feces-throwing incident,[152] yet the RMF movement did not stop. It continued to deliver demands for change. A sub-movement –

[150] Al Jazeera English, *Excerpt 1 of 'The Fall' Performed at 'Who Are the Activists behind the #RhodesMustFall Movement? | The Stream'*, 2018, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5lXhlOpOA4.
[151] Al Jazeera English, *Excerpt 2 of 'The Fall' Performed at 'Who Are the Activists behind the #RhodesMustFall Movement? | The Stream'*, 2018, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5lXhlOpOA4.
[152] Britta Timm Knudsen and Casper Andersen, 'Affective Politics and Colonial Heritage, Rhodes Must Fall at UCT and Oxford', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 3 (4 March 2019): 239, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1481134.

Fees Must Fall – emerged in the meantime.[153] Zarah and other student activists in their final year were graduating while protesting. Soon after, seven of them, including Zarah, started working on a theatre play about the movement. "We said to ourselves, 'We had to do something to make people understand why it was that we were there,'" Zarah told me, "The media had gotten their chance to speak, the university had gotten their chance to speak, but it was very rare that the students were getting their opportunity to speak in public and were being listened to in that way." Their work of seven months proved to be a success. Starting with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, "The Fall" later toured the world from Australia to Ireland to the U.S.

> *I don't want my life to be a series of violent gatherings where I'm always running away from the police and their stun grenades. I want to be seen. I want to matter. I'm tired. My soul is tired, but the reasons I came here the first time won't let me leave. They won't let me live a normal life.*[154]

"It was well-received because in every country you go to, there are people of color, and there are people who have suffered," Zarah reflected. "Our play is about so many things – colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism and how it's ruined the world, gender… If you are the kind of person who can see that there is a problem with the world, there is something in "The Fall" that will make sense to you." Zarah says she cannot imagine what her present self would be like without the movement and "The Fall" in particular. "Being with the movement and working with "The Fall," suddenly, I had the vocabulary, was reading books I'd never read before, understood intersectionality and how that lens could be applied to anything. That opened my way of making art. There is now a rigorous intellectual understanding of things that I didn't have when I was at university."

Zarah's story is a story of an activist who joined the movement that has moved – at least to a certain extent – the world by starting conversations on decolonization in education internationally. Here the students followed the path of a radical critique, a demand to diversify

[153] Knudsen and Andersen, 244.
[154] Al Jazeera English, *Excerpt 4 of 'The Fall' Performed at 'Who Are the Activists behind the #RhodesMustFall Movement? | The Stream'*, 2018, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5lXhlOpOA4.

education spaces, as well as a collective attempt to re-story the way the RMF protests were presented to the public and the world. I first dived into learning about the movement in a class on power and inequality I took: it was a student's initiative to suggest reading on the RMF student activism. We discussed the matter at length, and that class session turned into one of the most engaging ones. The movement has resonated with us. My recent conversation with Zarah, however, offered a perspective not covered by any analysis of the movement's impact I encountered before: here a personal evolution occurs through collective knowledge cultivation born out of the students' action in standing up against injustice within the university and beyond.

Conclusion

One warm October Sunday, sitting at a restaurant of South Indian cuisine on the Upper West Manhattan Side, I am trying to navigate the menu. The names of the dishes do not speak to me directly, while the ingredient descriptions confuse me even more. I browse through multiple options of Dosa, Uthappams, and Thalis. Luckily, I have my friends by my side. My classmate from India points to the dishes she wants me to try; my classmate from Pakistan insists on choosing the level of "spicy" that he thinks I can tolerate. We collectively decide I should try Idly.

The waiter, a man of Indian origin, approaches us,

"You are students? From Columbia?"

We are flattered. All smiling, we respond we are from Bard College. My friends make the order and kindly inquire if Idly is spicy. The waiter replies at length, yet I am struggling to understand him. I do catch one thing, though,

"For some people, yogurt is spicy," he says, grinning. We laugh.

At that table with a Russian, an Indian, and a Pakistani – all three are IR students – a most interesting conversation takes place. We talk about the food we grew up with and stumble upon inequality issues, visible through what people consume internationally. As vegetarian and meat diets differ across country borders, we deliberate on how in different places both can be signatures of either wealth or poverty. We attentively listen to each other, inevitably reaching the already-too-familiar conclusion: the foreign policy of the U.S. – where we spend our exchange semester – does not dive into our countries. In fact, the foreign policy of no state excels at gaining in-depth knowledge of "the Other." A question was left lingering: why so?

That warm October Sunday in New York, the space we found ourselves in was no classroom, yet it nourished both us and our knowledge of the world. In that space, we were distinctly present as individuals with a complexity of backgrounds and experiences. We carried on with ease and eagerness to share and learn from each other, and it led us to valuable IR discoveries. In that conversation, most importantly, we saw each other and listened carefully. "IR is a living organism," my friend mentioned recently, having gone through my writing on the discipline. Her metaphor stays with me: indeed, IR lives on in a variety of forms. As the classroom is one site of it, a critical teaching space – that sees the students, sees their differences, and acknowledges everyone's unique presence and input – nourishes those thoughts and ideas that we, IR students, carry with us further – beyond the university.

How can the IR classroom become a site of anti-racist pedagogical practice? Teaching IR critically, sensitively, and vulnerably can foster alternative understandings and enable anti-racist thinking. The address of epistemic justice – the notion that has ignited my interest – might resonate with other IR students, too. Inevitably, the venture is mutual. It is through collective recognition of each other – be it through student interactions or a student-professor setting – that our differences, backgrounds, and experiences offer to invite eager learning. Most importantly, they nurture awareness and active questioning. The classroom can welcome and channel such collective work. The work, however, will be crossing the classroom boundaries, just as the students are.

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