

# So, How Does Popular Culture Relate to World Politics?

Written by Jutta Weldes and Christina Rowley

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Fifteen years ago it was necessary to argue that IR as a discipline ignored popular culture (Weldes 1999, p. 117). Happily, this is no longer the case. Some corners of what might be called 'mainstream IR' (but only quite narrowly construed and mostly North American) still implicitly or explicitly insist that popular culture is not worthy of scholarly IR attention, perhaps because it is seen as 'low' politics, domestic politics, or not political at all. However, scholars from assorted perspectives and disciplines are eagerly and productively investigating myriad forms of popular culture in relation to every conceivable aspect of IR and world politics.[1] One might even argue that there now exists a sub-(inter-)discipline of Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP).[2]

In teaching a unit entitled 'Popular Culture and World Politics' – which Jutta first taught in the US in the 1990s and Christina and Jutta have taught/teach at the University of Bristol – we have been genuinely flummoxed by one thing. Some students invariably complain, well into or even at the end of the unit, 'But I don't understand – how *does* popular culture relate to world politics?'[3] Asking this question, given that the entire unit is organised around addressing it head on, indicates a 'stuckness' in a narrow understanding of IR (as discipline) or international relations (as state practice) or world politics (as a wider, but still conventional, set of trans-border practices). At the same time, this question reflects a further assumption, sometimes surprisingly difficult to shift, that there is/ought to be a simple, perhaps even singular, way to grasp how one 'thing' – popular culture – 'relates' (preferably causally) to another 'thing' – world politics. In typical positivist fashion, students often expect to find that popular culture 'does' something 'to' world politics (or, less often, that world politics 'does' something 'to' popular culture).

But these assumptions misunderstand. Analytically, both 'popular culture' and 'world politics' are complex and contested concepts, so there can be no singular understanding of either. Empirically, the objects and practices to which the terms refer, and the 'relations' between and among them, are varied, complex and dynamic. In this paper we take a preliminary stab at categorising analytically the relations that obtain between 'popular culture' and 'world politics' – and at suggesting why they matter. We present six types of relations between PC and WP, viewing each, in turn, as multifaceted and not unrelated to the others.[4] We then use the 'diamond engagement ring' to underscore the interconnections among these various relations.

A caveat is in order here: we are emphatically *not* precluding arguments about other possible relationships between popular culture and world politics. We wish to open up analytical spaces, not close them down. We want to show that there are already at least these very diverse (ways of understanding the) ways in which these 'things' relate to one another.[5] To paraphrase Robert Cox (1981, p. 128), these PCWP relationships matter to different audiences for diverse and sometimes competing reasons. This article thus highlights diverse ways in which these relationships matter (to us) in order to highlight how they should matter to more people, especially scholars and practitioners of world politics, in which we include the general public (Rowley and Weldes 2012). In so doing, we deliberately raise more questions than we can possibly answer. In highlighting the sheer breadth of what can be explored, we view this article as, in part, contributing to a very broad, but not definitive, PCWP research agenda.[6]

## State Uses of Popular Culture

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Perhaps the most obvious PCWP 'relation', at least for realist-inspired approaches/analysts, is that states actively use popular culture in many ways and for multiple purposes.[7] In both wartime and peacetime, popular culture plays a surprisingly (or not?) large role in foreign (and domestic) policies.

In times of war, states (sometimes notoriously) create, deploy, and exploit popular culture as/for propaganda (Robb 2004, Aulich 2011). For instance, posters and other media forms were famously deployed to define nations and their enemies in WWI (War Propaganda 2014, Welch n.d., Oliver n.d.); North Vietnamese posters similarly constituted the US enemy in the 'American War' (see 'Decades of Protest').[8] Films like *Casablanca* (1942), backed by the 'War Films' division of the US Department of War, sold US intervention in Europe to US publics, legitimating World War II and the attendant military expenditures and public sacrifices (Tunc 2007). *The Green Berets* (1968), starring John Wayne, was so overtly a propaganda film that the US Department of Defense had the usual credit thanking it for its assistance removed, for fear that it might undermine the film's propaganda value and draw unwanted attention to the department's involvement in Hollywood films (Robb 2004, pp. 277-284).

States also deploy popular culture in times of peace. To develop 'soft power', states engage in cultural diplomacy practices that actively deploy popular culture (UK House of Lords 2014, Rowley 2014). The British Council[9] seeks to build trust by enhancing cultural relations through international collaborations in, among other areas, fashion, film, music, theatre and dance. Post-9/11 American cultural exchange programmes also emphasise popular culture, notably sports (see the US Department of State's SportsUnited Facebook page)[10] and film, in trying to refurbish the US image in 'Muslim countries' (Mills 2014). Popular culture features centrally in the increasingly pervasive state practice of nation-branding (Anholt 2014). 'Brand Turkey',[11] for example, defines itself using the foodways metaphor of the 'coffeehouse' while also invoking shopping, the bazaar, cinema and folk dancing. 'Cool Britannia, the Blair government's cringe-worthy attempt to sell the UK internationally, drew explicitly on 1960s-style dress, on 'Britpop' and on 'Young British Artists' such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. The current 'Britain is GREAT'[12] incarnation showcases 'the very best of what Britain has to offer', invoking pop cultural resources including shopping, tourism, pubs, and cinema.

Sports play a diverse and particularly important role in foreign policy and state action. What famously became known as 'ping pong diplomacy' (DeVoss 2002) signalled a breakthrough in Cold War US-China relations when, in April 1971, 'at the invitation of the Chinese government, a nine-person United States table tennis team ... visited China for a series of exhibition matches' (Campagna 2011). This visit ultimately led to Nixon's visit to China and the re-establishment of US-China diplomatic relations (Griffin 2014). More mundanely, hosting the Olympics has long been desired by states to enhance their international status and showcase economic and cultural accomplishments (Schaffer and Smith 2000). The 1995 Rugby World Cup, held in South Africa, was a 'two-level' political 'game'. [13] Internationally, it signalled South Africa's post-Apartheid reintegration into the international community; domestically, it attempted to create a 'Rainbow Nation' as a new multicultural national identity (Steenveld and Strelitz 1998).[14]

## The Global Political Economy and/of Popular Culture

Most forms of popular culture are produced and consumed in industrial form, and these industries, their inputs (raw materials, labour, technology), practices (of production and consumption), and outputs (films, clothing, toys, etc.) transcend state boundaries. Whatever International Political Economy (IPE) scholars study – whether international trade, finance or intellectual property rights regimes (or the subversion of these, e.g. counterfeit consumer goods); MNCs and global divisions of labour; the relations of states and markets; or international economic advance/North-South relations – popular culture is always already enmeshed in both the IPE disciplinary landscape and the fabric of international political economic practices.[15]

US-China trade relations, for example, have a massive popular cultural component. The five largest categories of goods exported by China to the US include furniture and bedding, toys and sports equipment, and footwear (US Executive Office of the President 2014), while top US exports to China include the raw materials (e.g. metals and plastics) to make these. In 2005, the US Department of State warned prospective business investors via the US Embassy in Beijing that, '[o]n average, 20 percent of all consumer products in the Chinese market are counterfeit'. Among the items violating copyright and trademark regulations were 'auto parts, watches, sporting goods, shampoo,

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footwear, designer apparel, medicine and medical devices, leather goods, toys'. On a more positive note, the State Department has also lauded the recent US-Chinese film industry collaboration, notably the creation of Oriental DreamWorks – a joint venture of DreamWorks, Shanghai Media Group and two additional Chinese firms – as signalling the potential for further joint economic development in industries like television, theme parks and merchandising, leading to increased economic growth (Rivkin 2014).

Conversely, popular cultural industries and franchises are worthy of study in their own right as microcosms of IPE (e.g. the practices of the global tourism, fashion or music industries; competition among Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood; the globalisation of Harry Potter [Nexon and Neumann 2005]; the *Star Wars* franchise and director George Lucas' companies Lucasfilm and Industrial Light and Magic). The Disney Corporation, for instance, is itself an important global economic actor: it is involved in global intellectual property rights, trademark and copyright issues and disputes (Levin 2003); it competes with other brands internationally (Stewart 2006); it engages in economic diplomacy; it has a global workforce; it sources products globally; its consumer base is global.

Narrowing the focus from interstate economic relations and global industries to a single popular cultural artefact such as Cynthia Enloe's 'globetrotting sneaker' (2004, pp. 43-56) allows us to get at multiple dynamic intersections of (gendered) economics, politics and popular culture, including:

- The gendered dynamics of global production (sewing sneakers is feminised, management and security are masculinised);
- The gendered processes of migration and urbanisation (young, unmarried women in South Korea relocate to cities, sending home remittances) and the changes in gender relations that ensue;
- The gendered militarisation of economic production (US military bases protect export processing zones, in turn contributing to prostitution as a major base-related industry);
- The intersection of economics and security politics: during the Cold War, the US supported authoritarian regimes that prevented unionisation, keeping wages low; once the authoritarian regime, e.g. South Korea, 'fell' to democratisation – thereby allowing organised labour to demand better working conditions and wage rises – the sneaker trotted to the next US-supported, authoritarian, low-wage state, from (e.g.) South Korea/Taiwan to Indonesia, to Thailand, to China.

Using the node of the sneaker, Enloe thus draws our attention to the complexly intertwined and dynamic political economy of popular culture: the fundamental, structural inequalities and the diverse forms of power that must be exercised to ensure that the global economic system runs 'smoothly' and to keep a ready supply of fashionable footwear available for Western consumers.

### Global Flows are Cultural and Political

Relatedly, but distinctly, popular culture is also a central component of the contested flows, practices and processes of – depending on one's politics – homogenisation (whether understood as Americanisation, Westernisation or modernisation), hybridisation (Bhabha 1996), cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991) or globalisation. A first, and very basic, point concerns the *ubiquity* of these flows and the recognition that much of what flows *is* popular cultural (see our arguments in the previous section and consider, for example, the combined global outputs of Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood). For most people, these flows are experienced in and through popular culture. For example, Americanisation might be experienced through the pervasiveness of the US TV show *Dallas*, while modernisation might be experienced through the ubiquity of television in general.

A second dimension of these flows and their consequences is their supposed *uniformity*, which raises questions of homogenisation and hybridisation. The spread of English, facilitated by British colonialism and US imperialism, was shaped not only through official political documents and processes but also through popular cultural artefacts, such as the canon of English literature taught in missionary schools. Globally, ever-increasing numbers of people speak and/or understand English (learnt not only formally but also by listening to lyrics in American music, interpreting advertising slogans, chatting with tourists, etc.). Some people bemoan the apparently relentless spread of the English language and Anglo-American culture, spurring organisations such as the Académie française to protect national language and culture. At the same time, English colonialism led to the development of heterogeneous forms of

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Pidgin, Creole and other vernaculars (e.g. Ebonics)[16] around the world. These dynamics have local, national and global implications, for example in the ways that political and legal processes invariably privilege those who speak 'properly': vernaculars remain languages of the street, of the kitchen table, of music, rather than languages of commerce, finance or governance.

As these examples indicate, things – capital, technology, development, democracy, popular culture – are assumed to flow from the metropole to the periphery. Interrogating popular culture, however, complicates *directionality*, a third dimension, allowing us to highlight reverse cultural flows and 'multidirectional flows' (Otmazgin and Ben-Ari 2012, p. 3). Substantial portions of US 'New Age' culture, for example, are transplants from Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous American traditions (Berger 2003, pp. 12-14) and 'traditional Asian medicines, health and fitness practices and approaches to mental health', such as yoga and acupuncture, have successfully been disseminated to the West (van Elteren 2011, p. 160). Relatedly, immigrants bring their foodways with them, ultimately leading to cultural hybrids like chicken tikka masala. Immigrant foodways are often the basis for entrepreneurial activities, such as restaurants and grocery stores – initially supporting the diaspora communities, but, over time, also being frequented by the broader population. The wider acceptance of the incoming foodways is then linked to the integration of the immigrants, and their cultural practices more broadly, into a more multicultural society (Hackett 2013).

A fourth dimension – the *temporality* of these flows – can also be problematised through the lens(es) of popular culture. Although we tend to think of 'globalising' processes as the hallmark of capitalist (late or post-) modernity, such movements and flows, including popular cultural ones, well predate this era. As Amitav Ghosh (1992) wonderfully illustrates, extensive transnational trade relations existed between India and Egypt more than a millennium ago. Trading routes for popular cultural items (e.g. foods – tea, spices and salt – or textiles such as silk) linked the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa, Arabia, India and East Asia, demonstrating that diverse and spatially distant parts of the world have long been more complexly interconnected than contemporary narratives of globalisation imply (e.g. Artzy 2007, Liu 2001).

### World Politics/Popular Culture: Representations, Texts and Intertexts

Another form of relations concerns popular cultural *representations* of world politics. What most US Americans 'know' about the Arab-Israeli conflict, for example, comes from what they see, hear, and read in the news media – and, crucially, also what is presented in supposedly fictional popular cultural texts. This matters because media and cultural representations have political effects. Herman and Chomsky (1988, pp. 37-86) demonstrated that Cold War-era US news media gave differing amounts of attention to, for example, 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims. One Polish priest, murdered by the communist Polish police, garnered far more attention and outrage than did 100 'religious personnel murdered in Latin America by [right-wing] agents of US client states' (p. 38), with the result that audiences see the Polish state as more threatening than US Latin American allies, thereby legitimating anti-communism on the one hand and right-wing paramilitary violence on the other.

This conceptualisation of the relations between PC and WP hinges on a 'reflection' metaphor, in which popular culture (whether news media, film or TV) is interrogated on (and frequently judged by) the extent to which it mirrors the 'real world'. However, the relationship is much more complex than this correspondence theory of truth allows.[17] Popular culture not only reflects but also *constitutes* world politics. Popular cultural texts discursively construct the objects about which they speak (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Jack Shaheen (2009) demonstrates the overwhelmingly negative characteristics attributed to 'Arabs' in Hollywood films since the silent era. Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) provides a notable example, both in the grossly stereotypical visual representations of the Arab characters – Aladdin and Jasmine, as the protagonists, are of course exceptions, looking strikingly white and Western in comparison – and, quite controversially, in the original opening lyrics,[18] which were later replaced after complaints from, among others, the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (James 2009):

Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place

Where the caravan camels roam

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Where they cut off your ear

If they don't like your face

It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.

Similarly, through a variety of mechanisms (the 'ticking time bomb', the certainty that the person being tortured knows something, the hero's suffering about the moral dilemma), the television series *24* constructs torture as legitimate – indeed, as legitimate state policy – for the US (Mayer 2007, Van Veeren 2009). Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2010, p. 27) has shown that women in rural Egypt understand and interpret the pan-Islamic notion of 'Muslim women's rights' in part through representations of gender violence in popular national television serials like *A Matter of Public Opinion* (*Qadiya ra'y 'amm*). While popular cultural constructions are not the only sites in which identities, practices, institutions and objectives are discursively constituted, they are some of the most important. Popular culture is especially significant because we are all immersed in these discourses in our daily lives; they constitute our everyday common sense.

Popular cultural representations, moreover, are constructed *intertextually*. That is, the meanings of any one text depend on their being read in relation to other texts. And world politics and popular culture are very often read in relation to one another.[19] For example:

- While children can watch and enjoy the film *Chicken Run* (2000) without any knowledge of World War Two films, other viewers may make more complicated sense of the narrative and visual representations if they have seen *The Great Escape* (1963), which, in turn, itself represents, and can be intertextually interpreted in terms of, the Second World War in diverse ways.
- Popular debates about the 1980s US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) were conducted in terms of *Star Wars* (the 1977 film), with the result that SDI itself became known as 'star wars' (Weldes 2003, p. 2, Watkins Lang 2007).
- Globalisation is constituted in the frontier masculinity of adverts in *The Economist* (Hooper 2001).
- *Star Trek* represents both the light and the dark sides of US foreign policy (Weldes 1999).
- Both 'war' and 'sport' are frequently made intelligible through what Shapiro (1989) has dubbed the 'sport/war intertext'.

We have written about these and other intertextual relationships extensively elsewhere (Weldes 2001, Rowley 2010a).

It is important to note that this argument is not just about the construction, deployment and effects of stereotypes simplistically understood. Textual meanings are made through much more complex processes, which include the diverse ways in which visual and narrative elements of texts interact (Rowley 2010b).[20]

### The Politics of Cultural Consumption and Cultural Practices

While constructions are latent within texts (that is, texts contain potential readings), discursive labour is required to realise these. A subject's identity positions (we deliberately stress the plurality) do not determine how a text will be read/consumed/interpreted, but create the spaces for diverse readings to be actively articulated. One viewer of *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), for instance, may revel in the combat scenes and find support for their brand of US national patriotism and valorisation of the veteran; another may find the racial and gender dynamics of the film highly problematic and read into the film a critique of US popular culture and/or US foreign policy.

The politics of consumption extends beyond merely acknowledging that popular cultural artefacts are consumed in diverse ways. Consumption is inextricably linked to the production and re-production of meanings – the maintenance of some, the transformation of others (whether through subversion, overt challenge or gradual change). In some cases, these processes of production, challenge and transformation are overtly highlighted. For example, the satirical response[21] response to an Australia.com tourism commercial[22] reflects explicitly, and quite critically, on the

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status of immigrants and racial dynamics in Australian society. However, these processes of discursive re-production, maintenance and transformation are always already at work, whether we explicitly reflect on participating in them or not. When hip-hop 'travels' from the US to Sierra Leone (Lock 2005) or Indonesia (van Wichelen 2005), it does not 'stay' American. The music and those who produce and consume it are entangled in complex and transformative processes of meaning- and identity-making.

This discussion of consumption has thus far focused on the consumption of texts. However, consumption as a practice highlights the more general importance of cultural practices. Grocery shopping – a ubiquitous popular cultural practice – is interconnected with all sorts of political discourses and choices, around fair trade, organic produce, luxury, food miles, nutrition, development, value for money and animal welfare (to name just a few). Understanding people's shopping habits – how they justify their shopping choices, in which discursive terms they comprehend their place in the world, the emotional connections they have to certain brands, objects, behaviours – all of these form part of the dizzying complexity of this PC-WP relationship.[23]

We began with the politics of state uses of popular culture; here we wish to make the point that all of us are immersed in PCWP relationships. Indeed, the involvement of all of us in these relationships has been a tacit theme of all the preceding sections: we are the publics who decode state propaganda (sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting various elements); we buy Disney toys and visit Disney World; we create and patronise the restaurants on our high streets; we watch films, TV and YouTube.

### **The Many Facets of the Diamond[24]**

The diamond engagement ring links popular culture and world politics in a surprising number of ways. In this final section, we deploy that ring – an ostensibly frivolous, and highly gendered, symbol of tradition and romance – as a springboard to highlight the intimate and complex interconnections between and among the six PCWP relationships outlined above.[25]

Engagement rings, even in the West, have not always featured diamonds. This 'tradition', and the association of diamonds with eternal love and romance, was invented in the advertising campaigns of the diamond cartel De Beers. In 1947, the famous tagline 'A Diamond Is Forever' (ranked top advertising slogan of the twentieth century by Ad Age in 1999) was created for De Beers. It became De Beers' official motto in 1948 and has since accompanied all De Beers engagement ring advertising. Through this slogan, and massive advertising campaigns built upon it – notably involving radio, television and print media reports about royalty and other celebrities sporting diamond jewellery – De Beers created a popular cultural myth on the basis of which it successfully revitalised US diamond sales, which had been falling dramatically since the Great Depression (Sullivan 2013, Epstein 1982).[26] De Beers later effectively deployed this 'market driving' strategy, in which a company seeks 'to reshape, educate and lead the consumer, or more generally, the market' (Harris and Cai 2002, p. 173) – or, in other words, engages in economic propaganda – to transplant these Western-invented matrimonial representations and practices to Japan in the 1970s (Epstein 1982) and to China in the 1990s and beyond, where diamonds are perceived as white and thus unlucky (Harris and Cai 2002, p. 181). The diamond engagement ring, and its seemingly obvious popular cultural 'meaning', is the product of the global marketing practices of a major commercial cartel and an instance of cultural globalisation.

Because of the location of its raw material – the uncut diamond – this cartel, and the trade more generally, is implicated not only in global marketing but also in African politics and particularly in specific forms of African civil and international conflicts. The illicit diamond trade (sustained initially by Western and latterly by more global consumption) has been used to finance 'rebels' and thus to fuel war, while various African states also benefit (through taxation and other means) from the 'licit' diamond trade. States regulate the diamond trade in various ways, including through labour regulation, the regulation of mines' and miners' health and safety, and, most recently, the regulation of 'conflict diamonds' in/from states such as Sierra Leone, DRC, Angola, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire (Jakobi 2013; see also UNSCR 1385 [2001]). The Kimberley Process[27] Certification Scheme – a joint initiative of governments, industry and civil society – established in 2003, attempts to regulate uncut diamond production and trade. Buying your 'sweetheart' a diamond ring or your 'mistress' a tennis bracelet is thus an everyday consumptive practice with world political implications involving a wide range of international actors. Whether diamond consumers

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consciously reflect on it or not, they are complicit in a luxury trade (which contributes to the reproduction of global economic inequalities) and also, potentially, in the unethical undercurrents of 'blood diamonds' (see, e.g., the Human Trafficking Movie Project n.d.).

The concept of the 'blood diamond', too, is part of other aspects of popular culture, having been globally popularised by the eponymous film (2006) starring Leonardo DiCaprio (himself a world political as well as a film actor, with his producer/executive producer roles on such documentaries as *The 11th Hour* [2007] and *Virunga* [2014]). *Blood Diamond* and Kanye West's award-winning song 'Diamonds from Sierra Leone' (which samples Shirley Bassey's chorus from 'Diamonds are Forever' – see below) drew the problem of 'blood diamonds' to media and public attention, while simultaneously constructing this issue in specific ways. In particular, the film reproduces the colonialist representation of Africa as relentlessly chaotic, dangerous, backward, etc. In contrast, and while simultaneously encouraging licit diamond consumption, West deliberately draws attention to the complicity of US blood diamond consumers (himself included), linking their purchases with conflict in Africa. And he goes further, connecting the violence of the blood diamond trade with the drug-fuelled, violent 'bling' culture of parts of urban US. Interestingly, in a striking example of intertextuality, films such as *Blood Diamond* now provide the interpretive frame used by Western news media to discuss these issues (Sharma 2012).

Intertextuality similarly defines *Diamonds are Forever*, the 1971 film, part of the globally successful Cold War 007 franchise, in which British spy James Bond simultaneously combats South African diamond smuggling and an interconnected global nuclear threat. The film's title song, sung by Shirley Bassey, together with 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend' (from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1953], famously performed by Marilyn Monroe and also included in *Moulin Rouge* [2001]), and Madonna's 'Material Girl', all construct – in complex ways – the diamond, and diamond jewellery, as integral to women's identities and relationships with men. On the one hand they represent the diamond ring as a quintessential symbol of (heterosexual) romantic love and eternal attachment. On the other, however, women gain financial security from their expensive jewellery and sometimes have a more reliable relationship with the trustworthy jewel(ery) (Capon 2013). In some contexts (and contra the 'eternal love' trope), the diamond engagement ring offered, or was thought to offer, a financial surety for women who had consented to sex before marriage with their fiancés and were subsequently jilted (O'Brien 2012).

Finally, the diamond (and jewellery more generally) regularly appears in state diplomacy, perhaps most notably in the UK. The famous Indian Koh-i-Noor diamond, presented to Queen Victoria in 1850 (as a spoil of war), was set into the British Crown Jewels in 1937 (Nelson 2010, Tweedie 2010, see also The British Monarchy website.)[28] This diamond (and others in the Crown's possession) remains contentious symbols of British colonialism and exploitation. India recently demanded, again, that it be returned; UK Prime Minister David Cameron again refused (Groves 2010, BBC 2010). Queen Elizabeth II is regularly gifted with diamonds and other precious stones and jewellery, some of which, when the Queen functions as 'the personification and symbol of Britain to the outside world' (Jay 1992, p. 81), are deliberately redeployed as/in public diplomacy. When the Queen visits New Zealand, for example, she wears the diamond fern brooch given to her by 'the women of Auckland' on her first tour of New Zealand in 1953 (Tapaleao 2014); it was similarly worn, more recently, by the Duchess of Cambridge (English 2014). While these particular diamonds do not represent romance, they do represent state identities and the undying allegiance of the New Zealand 'people' to the British Commonwealth and monarchy (classic international relations to which popular culture ostensibly does not relate).

The diamond engagement ring – which looks at first glance to be a minor popular culture artefact 'about' romance – thus turns out to be intimately and complexly intertwined with a multitude of (themselves interconnected) world political actors, processes, practices, meanings and flows.

### Some Conclusions

In examining diverse relations between 'popular culture' and 'world politics', we have also problematised the 'international' and the 'relations' in IR. We have opened the black box of 'popular culture' to examine the actors, institutions, processes, texts, sites and practices connected with it. As a result, 'world politics' looks broader and more complex than it did, shifting from a narrow focus on supra-/trans-/international state relations and practices, to

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trans-border practices by powerful non-state actors, to increasingly seeing the sub-national/regional and hyper-local – the everyday, in fact – as globally and politically implicated. However, as we have already noted, problematising world politics by highlighting popular culture, while challenging world politics, also continues to privilege it, to reinforce its status. We hope for the day when we no longer need to explain or justify how and why popular culture is relevant to world politics and can just get on with studying it.

While we have attempted not to judge the relative value of the six relationships that we have outlined, it should be clear that they are not all based on the same underlying assumptions about the world and how we can 'know' or study it. The massive analytical cost that comes with simplifying (reducing) the complexity of the world, of people, of processes and practices, has all too frequently been understated, ignored or denied in the pursuit of abstract models, laws and patterns. We have tried to demonstrate that the sheer volume and inherent messiness of the everyday – people's everyday lives, practices, meanings and identities, within which popular culture is embedded and of which it is constitutive – is intrinsically and significantly related to questions of world politics. As Enloe (1996) has famously argued, despite its focus on power, IR radically underestimates the amounts and types of power needed for 'world politics' to function as 'it' does. Examining the everyday phenomena that 'are' popular culture helps us to grasp the centrality of the many 'margins, silences and bottom rungs' of world politics.

## Notes

[1] We use IR to refer to use scholarly practices and theories, and 'world politics' to mean local, regional, national and global practices. This distinction, while problematic, is useful for our argument.

[2] See also [www.pcwpnet1.wordpress.com](http://www.pcwpnet1.wordpress.com) and the Routledge PCWP book series. The interdisciplinary and international character of PCWP can be seen in the PCWP conferences: PCWP1, University of Bristol, 2008 (convened by us); PCWP2, Newcastle University, 2009 (Matt Davies, Kyle Grayson, Simon Philpott); PCWP3, York University, Toronto, 2010 (David Mutimer); PCWP4, University of Lapland, 2011 (Julian Reid, Laura Junka-Aikio); PCWP5, Hobart and Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY, 2011 (Kevin Dunn); PCWP6, Stockholm University, 2013 (Michele Micheletti, Kristina Riegert); PCWP7, University of Ottawa, 2014 (Mark Salter, Sandra Yao, David Grondin).

[3] This question, and its implied desire for certainty and singularity, resonates with Marysia Zalewski's (1995) question, 'Well, what is the feminist perspective on Bosnia?'.

[4] Each of these types of relationship also has interesting teaching applications (for scholarly sources with a pedagogical focus, see e.g. Beavers 2002, Ruane and James 2008, Davies 2013, Weber 2014) but these are sadly beyond the scope of this article.

[5] We draw heavily on US and UK examples not because they are more important but because we are most familiar with these.

[6] We welcome suggestions of other relationships that we have unwittingly omitted.

[7] Non-state actors of course also deploy popular culture in similarly instrumental ways. The role of social media in the 'Arab Spring' is a case in point and has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g. Aouragh and Alexander 2011, Shirky 2011).

[8] 'Decade of Protest: Political Posters from the United States, Cuba and Vietnam 1965-1975', *The Sixties Project*, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Exhibits/Track16.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Exhibits/Track16.html).

[9] British Council, <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/>>.

[10] SportsUnited – US Department of State, Facebook, <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/SportsUnited-US-Department-of-State/10150101343025475>>.



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[11] Brand Turkey, <<http://turkeyfe.org/index.php/brandturkey>>.

[12] 'Britain is GREAT', GOV.UK, <<https://www.gov.uk/britainisgreat>>.

[13] Robert Putnam's (1988) concept neatly reveals both the permeation of popular cultural terms in IR – the use of the 'game' metaphor – and the hierarchisation at work in the domestic/international binary.

[14] Again, this example is more complex than it initially appears. This World Cup became the subject of a globally popular 2009 film, which itself invoked the Victorian-era poem: *Invictus* (Henley 1988).

[15] On an intertextual note, in 1986, *The Economist* invented the 'Big Mac Index' as a 'light-hearted guide' to misaligned exchange rates. It has since shifted from being a trivial pop culture reference to being 'a global standard, included in several economic textbooks and the subject of at least 20 academic studies' (D.H. and R.L.W. 2014).

[16] Rickford, J.R. (no date) 'What is Ebonics (African American English)?', *Linguistic Society of America*, <<http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-ebonics-african-american-english>>.

[17] By a correspondence theory of truth, we mean the popular and generally unspoken belief that language, broadly understood, unproblematically refers to an equally unproblematised and distinct 'real world'.

[18] 'Arabian Nights Lyrics', *Metro Lyrics*, <<http://www.metrolyrics.com/arabian-nights-lyrics-aladdin.html>>

[19] Which precise texts are read intertextually is contingent upon the reader and their familiarity, or lack thereof, with other texts.

[20] The analysis of visual, cultural, textual representations, although not conducted from identical theoretical more methodological standpoints, constitutes by far the largest body of PCWP literature within IR – too large to review adequately here.

[21] YouTube (2006) 'Where the bloody hell are you?' video spoof, uploaded 13 September 2006, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=411ueiat2sY>>.

[22] YouTube (2006) 'Where the bloody hell are you?' video advertisement, uploaded 20 March 2006, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn0lwGk4u9o>>.

[23] We have not discussed the emotional dimensions of PCWP in any depth here, but this is an as yet particularly underexplored dynamic (see Crawford 2003, Bleiker and Duncombe 2015, and Dodds 2015 in this collection).

[24] For a well-developed conceptualisation of 'facets' and research methodology, see Mason (2011).

[25] We recognise that our construction of this example privileges world politics over popular culture by forcing the diamond ring to prove its relevance to the latter, thus reproducing the privileging of WP over PC that we challenge in this article.

[26] During this early advertising campaign, Queen Elizabeth II – who makes another diamond-studded appearance below – visited several South African diamond mines and 'accepted a diamond from [Harry] Oppenheimer', Chairman of De Beers, thus adding another overtly world politics dimension (Epstein 1982).

[27] Kimberley Process, (n.d.) 'The Kimberley Process (KP)', <<http://www.kimberleyprocess.com>>.

[28] The official website of the British Monarchy, 'The Crown Jewels', <<http://www.royal.gov.uk/the%20royal%20collection%20and%20other%20collections/thecrownjewels/overview.aspx>>.

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