The World(s) of IR: continental perspectives

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KNUD ERIK JøRGENSEN, APR 28 2010

When preparing this editorial, I read with great interest Peter Vale's previous editorial "IR and the Global South: final confessions of a schizophrenic teacher". It seems that we share a number of concerns and dilemmas: ways of thinking and knowing international affairs, how to order a complex world by means of scholarly categories, processes of inclusion and exclusion in the production of mutually acknowledged knowledge, and contrasts between what we teach (to whom) and our findings as analysts of world politics. In this respect, Vale points to the contrast between teaching "bleak, wintry English landscape" images to students living "under a blazing sun".

The aim of this contribution is twofold: to highlight continental diversity in cultivating the discipline and to pinpoint some of the parochial perspectives within IR that conventionally are presented as universal. The category of 'continent' is very suitable for these purposes, especially because this unit of analysis provokes scholars cherishing state-centric perspectives (methodological nationalism), arguing for instance that liberal, realist and perhaps ten more theoretical orientations in Germany are what make the German IR tradition so special or distinct and, in turn, fundamentally different from Spanish, French, British or Scandinavian IR traditions. I begin with the case of continental Europe and subsequently globalize my continental horizons.

The case of continental Europe is special in several ways and contains several intriguing paradoxes. It is a continent that has produced some of the most prominent contemporary social theorists – e.g. Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu and Niklas Luhmann – but the insights of their social theory has not really been 'translated' into IR theory in any comprehensive or structured fashion. A similar structural inability applies to potentially fruitful reflexive dialogues between IR theory and post-structural and post-modern philosophy (with the notable exceptions of Ole Wæver's securitization school or Iver Neumann's research on discourse and diplomacy). The case of continental Europe is also special in the sense that early American IR intellectually was significantly marked by European influence. The inflow of central European IR scholars (Morgenthau, Herz, Wolfers, Deutsch, Liska etc.), fleeing Nazism and fascism in the 1930s, meant that American IR scholarship received a very significant boost of European perspectives. This inflow even included Vienna Circle positivists (Carnap, Hempel, Nagel and others). The European states these refugees left behind got an identity as either WW2 losers or former occupied countries (or neutrals). Moreover, continental Europe soon found itself cut into East and West (and neutrals), squeezed between the two (new) superpowers and some of the European states engaged in the game of losing colonial wars. In contrast to America, elevated to global power status and a government in need of a helping hand to simply understanding the world, governments in Europe did not need scholarship to point out factors explaining increasing decline and insignificance. Hence, International Relations scholars were relatively few and for a long time they did not constitute a common European IR community. Some had grave doubts about the endeavour of discipline-formation, explaining why it would be impossible to build IR theory (Aron 1967) or they simply kept their former disciplinary identity whether in Law, History, Sociology or Philosophy.

The case of continental Europe prompted the development of the cultural-institutional approach to studies of disciplinary developments, highlighting three main factors: the political culture of the countries or regions in which theorizing takes place; the organizational culture of science bureaucracies and university systems; the habits, attitudes and professional discourse within the social sciences. Even if developed to understand the case of Europe,

this approach might be applicable in research on the trajectories of the discipline on other continents. Actually, when pointing to the role of the imperial optic and culture in which the discipline developed in South Africa, Vale illustrates the suitability of these factors. My "Continental IR theory" (2000) received some wry comments, and rightly so! In the first place because obviously Europe does not enjoy a monopoly of being continental and, second, the article was fairly general, leaving aside a fair bit of nuance. Acknowledging the criticism, I had to be more inclusive and more nuanced (cf. Jørgensen 2003 and Jørgensen and Knudsen eds. 2006),

Let us now move from the particular to the general. Self-images of the discipline are often presented by means of general features (cf. Smith 1995) and, to the degree they are connected to specific countries or regions, the name of the game is to identify deviations from the norm, for instance as in Chris Brown' ironic title, "Fog in the Channel: Continental IR Isolated" (Brown 2001). This state of affairs invites reflections on deductive and inductive procedures. The great thing about deductive approaches is that they aim at consolidating general knowledge, the method being testing, testing and testing. Yet the Achilles heel is that the approach by default regards any case as a case of .., i.e., tends to be insensitive to specific features. When it comes to inductive procedures, the opposite characteristics apply: they aim at establishing general insights, not testing but constituting. Finally, when something particular is elevated to the status of general or universal knowledge, to be deductively tested, then it is a safe bet that the risk of over-determination proliferate. I used the case of continental Europe to raise some doubts about the so-called general characteristics of the discipline, showing for instance that the great debates, to the degree they characterize the genealogy of the discipline at all, took different directions in Europe. Other analysts analyzing other continents might well reach similar conclusions. Hence, the general features said to characterize the discipline cannot possibly have been reached by means of inductive procedures. This raises the delicate issue of where they originated.

Best Western? Without much fanfare perhaps, Vale employs notions such as *Western epistemology* (referring to the edifice on which IR's theoretical canon – e.g. liberal, realist and other traditions – has been founded) and*African ways of knowing the international*. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan trigger similar images when they bluntly ask, "Why is there no non-western IR theory" (2010). However, it seems worthwhile to pause here and perhaps engage in some further reflections on the issues of origin and nature. First, it is kind of easy to characterize the nature of the English School notion of international society as "Western" (definitely not Southern or Eastern) or "Euro-centric" (given that the concept referred to the genealogy of European international society). Yet one of the key conceptualizers was Charles Manning, a South African citizen and, as it happens, a supporter of apartheid. Moreover, the concept was coined in the temporal borderland between the British Empire and the British Commonwealth. Hence, readers of this contribution can choose between different origins. Second, the notion of democracy is commonly said to have an origin in Greece. Yet if we are to follow the reasoning of Samir Amin, Greece has been stolen by Europe and really is African. Hence, one of the most precious concepts of the western world, democracy, is in this narrative actually African. Third, the idea of human rights is frequently called 'Western' and, like the law of gravity, rightly so. However, it also seems that the idea subsequently got subscribers around the world, at least most states find membership of the United Nations worthwhile, and sign up to UN Charter principles.

Vale also addresses the issue of sovereign statehood, pointing out how sovereign statehood is celebrated in newly (in historical terms) independent states, yet also emphasizes that African states share the rather common fate of having great difficulty in simply 'hanging together'. On this background he asks how he can possibly teach his students to look into this potential future of disintegrating states, especially when the analytical lenses of the discipline are so inherently state-centric. However, European teachers experience a somewhat similar challenge, because many of their students live in a largely post-sovereign European Union, i.e. a unit that in most textbooks at best is characterized as an international organization along with other international organizations. Both American and Asian students would benefit from being introduced to this post-sovereign form of statehood.

In summary, five wider perspectives seem particularly important. The first is to acknowledge the actually existing global diversity of practicing the discipline. This kind of recognition will take the steam out of several claims about universal validity but it will also raise the important issue of the relative merits of the different ways of knowing the 'international'. One thing is certain: diversity should probably not be cherished for its own sake. Second, further meta-studies of the genealogy of the discipline and its concepts around the world seem to be a promising way forward. Such meta-studies simply allow us to identify patterns and trends in disciplinary developments as well as fault-lines

of professional debates: an eminent platform for shaping the discipline in ways we deem best. Third, where linkages between research and teaching are weak, they should be strengthened. In the long run it is simply too embarrassing that we tend to teach what we find in textbooks even if research in the meantime has reached other conclusions. Fourth, given that theory building is a craft that is practiced very unevenly around the world, theory building should be encouraged. This is easy to suggest yet considerably more difficult to do, especially because in many places theory is not a valued form of knowledge. Finally, systematic inter-continental reflexive dialogues might help strengthening awareness concerning both diverging and common trajectories of the discipline.

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Knud Erik Jørgensen *is Professor of International Relations at Aarhus University, Denmark. He publishes this month a textbook, International Relations Theory: A New Introduction (Palgrave) and co-edits (with Audie Klotz) the Palgrave Series of International Relations.*

About the author:

Knud Erik Jørgensen is Professor of International Relations at Aarhus University, Denmark.
He is the author of, International Relations Theory: A New Introduction (Palgrave) and co-edits (with Audie Klotz) the Palgrave Series of International Relations.