Problematising the Global in Global IR

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Abstract
International Relations (IR) has long been criticised for taking a particular (Western) experience as basis for formulating theories with claim to universal validity. ‘Non-Western’, ‘post-Western’, and postcolonial theories have been criticising the problem of Western parochialism and have developed specific strategies of changing IR. Global IR has taken up some of these concerns and aims at changing the discipline by theorising international politics as multiplex, taking different experiences, histories, and agencies into account. Yet, we argue that this agenda rests on a partial reading of IR’s critics, failing to take seriously the epistemological and methodological critiques of IR and therefore perpetuating some of the discipline’s ‘globalisms’. Therefore, first, Global IR reifies the idea of a truly universal body of knowledge. The global is logically prior to this as an imagined space of politics and knowledge. Second, Global IR assumes that scholars around the world aspire and are able to contribute to a single body of knowledge. While reifying these globalisms, Global IR fails to ask where this global imaginary comes from and what its effects are on the distribution of power and wealth. We argue that instead of assuming ‘the global’ as descriptive category, a more substantial and reflexive critique of IR’s exclusionary biases should start from reconstructing these globalisms and their effects.

Keywords
Global IR, epistemology, the global

Problématiser le « mondial » dans les RI mondiales

Résumé
Les relations internationales sont depuis longtemps critiquées pour avoir adopté un point de vue spécifique (occidental) dans la formulation de théories qui se revendiquent universelles. Les théories « non occidentales », « post-occidentales » et postcoloniales ont donc élaboré des stratégies...

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visant à transformer les RI. Les RI mondiales ont repris certaines de ces préoccupations et visent à transformer la discipline en théorisant la politique internationale comme étant multiplex, en tenant compte d’une pluralité d’expériences, d’histoires et d’acteurs. Pourtant, nous soutenons que ce projet repose sur une lecture partielle des critiques des RI qui ne tient pas compte des critiques épistémologiques et méthodologiques qui leur sont faites et qui préserve ainsi certains des « mondialismes » de la discipline. Par conséquent, les RI mondiales réfient l’idée d’un ensemble de connaissances véritablement universel. « Le mondial » est en toute logique antérieur à cette idée, en tant qu’espace imaginé de politique et de connaissance. D’autre part, les RI mondiales partent du principe que les intellectuels du monde entier aspirent à contribuer à un seul et même ensemble de connaissances, et qu’ils en ont la capacité. Alors qu’elles réfient ces mondialismes, les RI mondiales échouent à questionner les origines de cet imaginaire mondial et ses effets sur la distribution des richesses et du pouvoir. Nous affirmons qu’au lieu de considérer « le mondial » comme une catégorie descriptive, une critique plus fondamentale et réflexive des biais d’exclusion des RI doit commencer par la reconstruction de ces mondialismes, de leurs dimensions idéologiques et de leurs effets.

**Mots-clés**

RI mondiales, épistémologie, le mondial

**La problematización de lo global en las Relaciones Internacionales globales**

**Resumen**

Las Relaciones Internacionales han sido criticadas durante mucho tiempo por tomar una sola experiencia (la occidental) como base para la formulación de teorías que aspiran a una validez universal. Las teorías no-occidentales, post-occidentales y postcoloniales han desarrollado estrategias para modificar las RR.II. Las RR.II. globales han incorporado algunas de estas inquietudes y tratan de transformar la disciplina teorizando la política internacional como un mundo multiplex, tomando en consideración diversas experiencias, historias y agentes. Aun así, sostenemos que esta propuesta se mantiene en una lectura incompleta de los críticos de las RR.II. y por ello fracasa a la hora de incorporar en profundidad las críticas epistemológicas y metodológicas de las RR.II. Esto tiene como consecuencia que se perpetúen algunos de los «globalismos» de la disciplina. Por ende, las RR.II. globales reifican la concepción de un corpus de conocimiento verdaderamente universal. Lo global es lógicamente anterior, entendido como un espacio imaginado de política y conocimiento. En segundo lugar, las RR.II. globales dan por hecho que los académicos de todas partes del mundo aspiran y pueden contribuir a un único corpus de conocimiento. Al reificar estos globalismos, las RR.II. globales fracasan a la hora de cuestionar el origen de este imaginario global y sus efectos en cuanto a la distribución del poder y la riqueza. Sostenemos que, en vez de concebir lo global como una categoría descriptiva, una crítica más valiosa y reflexiva de los sesgos excluyentes de las RR.II. debería comenzar por reconstruir estos globalismos, sus dimensiones ideológicas y sus efectos.

**Palabras clave**

RR.II. globales, epistemología, lo global

**Introduction**

For at least three decades now, critical and postcolonial scholars have been critiquing the exclusionary and reductionist ontology underpinning the social sciences, which claims
universal validity for what is in fact a very particular European/Western historical experience.\(^1\) International Relations (IR) was late to acknowledge this, but after the turn of the millennium in particular, a growing number of scholars adopted such a perspective within – or at the margins of – IR, discussed inter alia under the labels of ‘non-Western’\(^2\) and ‘post-Western’\(^3\) approaches to or ‘worlding’\(^4\) and decolonisation\(^5\) of IR. Though quite different in their specific critiques, together these approaches raised a number of questions and concerns that went beyond the mere demand for more diversity and better representation of hitherto marginalised voices and experiences. Rather, these debates also pointed to the deep-seated power relations that have shaped IR’s ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations. However, though far-reaching in their critique, these approaches fell short of changing the mainstream of IR.

At the 2014 annual convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) in Toronto, then, the newly inaugurated ISA President, Amitav Acharya, set out to change ‘the way that we study, publish, and discuss IR’ with a ‘new agenda for international studies’.\(^6\) In line with the above critique of the discipline’s parochialism, Acharya held that ‘IR’s dominant narratives, theories, and methods fail to correspond to the increasingly global distribution of its subjects’.\(^7\) He criticised the fact that mainstream IR had so far considered ‘the non-Western world as interest mainly to area specialists’ only.\(^8\) Acharya therefore invited IR

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1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Connected Sociologies: Theory for a Global Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
2. Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2003): 295–324; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (London: Routledge, 2010); Robbie Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
3. Pinar Bilgin, ‘Thinking Past “Western” IR?’, *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 5–23; Giorgio Shani, ‘Toward a Post-Western IR: The “Umma,” “Khalsa Panth,” and Critical International Relations Theory’, *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 722–34; Rosa Vasilaki, ‘Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3–22.
4. Ole Wæver and Arlene B. Tickner, eds., *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London: Routledge, 2009); Arlene B. Tickner and David Blaney, eds., *Thinking International Relations Differently* (London: Routledge, 2012).
5. Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Branwen G. Jones, ed., *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Meera Sabaratnam, ‘IR in Dialogue . . . But Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 781–803.
6. Amitav Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014), 647–59, 649.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 648–49; already in Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations*. 
scholars to ‘reimagine IR as a global discipline’ and to work for ‘greater inclusiveness and diversity’.9 He called this new agenda Global International Relations – Global IR – which he hoped would become ‘a vibrant, innovative, and inclusive enterprise that reflects the voices, experiences, interests, and identities of all of humankind’.10 Since then, a growing number of contributions have found shelter under the roof of Global IR, giving IR’s mainstream a ‘more global’ face.11 In addition to these research outputs, two ISA conferences conducted within 5 years dedicated to this topic and the efforts of several journal editors to increase representation of hitherto marginalised voices12 are all testimony to the fact that the agenda of Global IR is already shaping scholarly practices.

However, despite its success in opening the mainstream up to ‘non-Western’ perspectives, we will argue in this article that the agenda of Global IR as set out by Acharya is itself problematic. In so doing, we attach importance to Acharya’s proposition that ‘the idea of Global IR should remain a broad umbrella, open to contestation, interpretation, elaboration, and extension’.13 We embrace Global IR’s call for a profound change in the way IR is imagined, studied, taught, and published, based on a critique of the discipline’s parochial epistemological and ontological foundations and its exclusionary approach to deciding which and whose knowledge is considered a valuable contribution to the discipline. However, we argue that there is a problematic aspect at the core of this agenda, which is evident in the unquestioned retainment of long-established ‘globalisms’ of IR, on the one hand, and Global IR’s quite surprising lack of explicit interest in subjecting the construction and consequences of these ‘globalisms’ to empirical scrutiny, on the other.

By ‘globalisms’ we mean an imaginary of the globe as a holistic and universal entity.14 An imaginary is a visualised element of a symbolic or discursive arrangement.
It allows for cognitive simplification, a preform of the real which contributes to the collective constitution of social order. This pre-reflexive framework is, despite its intangibility, ‘quite “real” in the sense of enabling common practices and deep-seated communal attachments’. As we will discuss in this article, Global IR is based on a twofold proposition in which ‘the global’ is reified as an unquestionable object. This occurs, first, in the postulate that Global IR aims at nourishing one disciplinary body of knowledge, which is based on the idea of ‘pluralistic universalism’. Despite its recognition of plurality and difference, true IR knowledge is thus still singular and measured in terms of its proven/assumed universal validity. Second, Global IR also reifies a globalism in its postulate that more scholars from the Global South should be ‘brought into’ the discipline to advance IR’s pluralism. Apart from essentialising questions of representation, this sets an imagined global IR community of scholars as standard for who is considered worthy of speaking for and about world politics. By consequence, this excludes all those who either cannot or do not want to become integrated into and associated with this community. In turn, it is surprising that of the six areas Acharya identified as intellectual pathways and challenges for Global IR scholars, what is lacking is an empirical investigation of the historical and contemporary construction and presence of globalisms, their consequences for the (re-)configuration of power relations, international order, and the distribution of wealth. In so doing, Global IR mistakes ‘the global’ for an analytical category, failing to theorise the concept’s ideological dimensions, and hence also neglects to reflect on the paradoxical reification of hierarchical structures that Global IR itself tends to sustain. Thus, while in some regard the agenda of Global IR retains the globalisms it initially intended to overcome, it also neglects the importance of globalisms as problematique, that is, as an analytical problem at the heart of its intellectual purpose. The problem at hand is, thus, neither Global IR’s commitment to ‘the global’ per se nor the fact that Global IR works with a ‘wrong’ understanding of the global, but rather the missed opportunity to reflect on its very own understanding of the global. Because the specific imaginary of ‘the global’ that underpins Global IR has not been problematised, this imaginary has been used as if it were the representation of an objective ‘globality’. As a result, the project lacks the tools to reflect on the – scholarly and practical political – consequences emanating from this specific understanding of the global.

15. Ute Tellmann, ‘Das Imaginäre’, in DiskursNetz. Wörterbuch der interdisziplinären Diskursforschung, eds. Daniel Wrana, et al. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 191; Cornelius Castoriadis, The Imaginary Institution of Society (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).
16. Manfred B. Steger, The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.
17. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 649–50.
18. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 14.
19. Christopher Murray, ‘Imperial Dialectics and Epistemic Mapping: From Decolonisation to anti-Eurocentric IR’, European Journal of International Relations 26, no. 2 (2020): 419–42.
20. Audrey Alejandro, Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), Chapter 5.
21. David L. Blaney and Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR’, Millennium: Journal of International Studies 45, no. 3 (2017): 293–311.
In sum, we argue that although Global IR builds on long-standing concerns of the critical and postcolonial scholarship that predated it, it crucially circumvents some of the more fundamental questions raised by that scholarship as to which and whose knowledge counts in IR. What is more, with its unquestioned globalisms, Global IR introduces far-reaching closures that prevent an open-ended engagement with these questions in the future. While its agenda does indeed hold the potential to expand the discipline’s ontological, epistemological, and methodological radar, as well as to broaden scholarly participation, it does so at the cost of preserving the discipline as a particular canon of knowledge and scholarly community. Consequently, Global IR falls short of providing a more profound critique of the hitherto dominant forms of imagining and doing IR. Against this background, Global IR is at risk of becoming a novel, apparently benign, hegemonic project that advocates for inclusiveness, plurality, and globality, but on the condition of establishing new, while glossing over old power relations, that structure how and by whom the international is studied. Our goal is explicitly not to present the true approach to (Global) IR, but to promote a more open and inductive search for and problematisation of the global. The purpose of this article is therefore not to merely deconstruct Global IR, but to argue for the importance of problematising the global more generally – as the core of the new agenda for studying international politics that Global IR promised to be. We consider such an engagement with Global IR important because – unlike Global IR’s critical precursors – it holds the potential to actually affect the core of the discipline rather than merely tackling issues on the margins. A look at other disciplines – such as sociology, ethics, and history – shows that these have already conducted similar debates. ‘Global History’, for instance, challenged the discipline of history by demonstrating the added value of globalising the historiography of specific epochs and issues, thereby challenging the dominant understandings of the genesis of the
world we inhabit. But Global History has also rapidly developed into a self-reflexive discipline that takes into account the unique characteristics of the places through which the global is anticipated, interpreted, and shaped.29 Furthermore, historians’ particular sensibility for time has shown that rather than accepting the global as a given, it may be advisable to speak of ‘global moments’ in particular circumstances.30 Such scholarly works have shown that globalising history does not simply mean expanding the object of study, but focusing on the entanglements and competing visions underlying and producing what is interpreted as ‘the global’.31 This reflexive tendency in history gives us reason to hope that such engagement can also productively affect how IR scholars think about international politics and the discipline itself.

This article is structured as follows. The next section briefly introduces the main criticisms of IR’s parochialism which provided fertile ground for Acharya’s proposal and allowed it to enter the debate. It is against the background of these critiques that we interpret the Global IR agenda proposed by Amitav Acharya and its subsequent adoption in the IR community. Building on this, we formulate a friendly critique of this agenda based on Global IR’s unquestioned globalisms and how they affect the extent to which it is possible to change the way we ‘study, publish, and discuss IR’.32 This is followed by a discussion on what problematising the global might entail and what form it might take: We present avenues for an empirical-analytical agenda into the global imaginary and then make the case for a self-reflexive problematisation of the global based on an aspirational understanding of the concept which also takes into account its ideological aspects. We conclude with a reflection on the merits and limits of this approach.

Global IR’s Critical Precursors

Global IR as a programme was made possible by an increasingly vocal and critical field of IR scholarship which provided its intellectual breeding ground. Many of the observations on which Global IR is based had already been formulated by these critics of mainstream IR. The common starting point for all these scholars was their critique of Eurocentrism,33 which has since been unpacked regarding various aspects of IR, such as
sovereignty, norms, and peace and security. Although these critics share a rejection of Eurocentrism, their respective arguments vary in terms of their content, agenda, and radicalism. While we cannot do justice to the breadth of the debate here, it is important to recognise the stark differences that exist within this field of critique. In order to understand Global IR as defined by Acharya, it is crucial to identify which aspects of the critique were incorporated and which were left aside. To illustrate this, we propose to define a continuum to distinguish between ‘non-Western IR’, ‘post-Western IR’ and postcolonial approaches.

Non-Western IR is a movement of scholars that has been critical of IR for its narrow geographical focus, particularly its Eurocentrism. These approaches therefore sparked a wave of scholarship that analysed international politics from the viewpoint of non-Western subjects. These ‘homegrown’ theories have been attempting to close the gaps created by a Western-dominated IR through ‘widening the world of International Relations’ and introducing IR theories from places and representing worldviews outside the Euro-American experience.

Closely related, and sometimes even synonymous, scholarship adopting the ‘post-Western’ IR perspective has highlighted how IR projected a particular trajectory on ‘the world’ at large. These scholars seek to go beyond the ‘derivative discourses’ of the West.

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34. Turan Kayaoglu, ‘Westphalian Eurocentrism in International Relations Theory’, *International Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2010): 193–217; Siba N. Grovogui, ‘Regimes of Sovereignty: International Morality and the African Condition’, *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 3 (2002): 325–38; Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy Shaw, eds., *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory* (London: Palgrave, 2001); Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira and John Hobson, ‘The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 735–58.

35. Robin Dunford, ‘Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty: Decolonising and Democratising Norm Diffusion?’, *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (2015): 145–67; Charlotte Epstein, ‘Stop Telling Us How to Behave: Socialization or Infantilization?’, *International Studies Perspectives* 13, no 2 (2012): 135–45; Elias Steinhilper, ‘From “the Rest” to “the West”? Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Western Bias in Norm Diffusion Research’, *International Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (2015): 536–55.

36. Meera Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism in the Critique of the Liberal Peace’, *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 3 (2013): 259–78.

37. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’; Acharya and Buzan, ‘Non-Western International Relations Theory’.

38. Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Waever, *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London: Routledge). Wiebke Wemheuer Vogelaar and Ingo Peters, eds., *Globalizing International Relations: Scholarship Amidst Divides and Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, eds., *Claiming the International* (London: Routledge, 2013).

39. Ersel Aydinli and Gonca Biltekin, *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing* (London: Routledge, 2018); Yaqing Qin, ‘Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (2007): 313–40; Dunn and Shaw, *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory*.

40. Pinar Bilgin, ‘The International Political “Sociology of a Not So International Discipline”’, *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 3 (2009): 338–42.
by identifying critical political discourses from non-Western traditions.41 However, in adding these theories from and about particular places, these scholars not only seek to improve the contextualisation of IR theories. Their goal is ‘also (perhaps more so) about opening IR up to approaches shaped by different epistemological and ontological outlooks so that the study of IR would better reflect how the international is understood and practised in different parts of the world’.42 IR, in turn, must become more pluralistic to actually theorise world politics.43

While originating in a similar analysis of a Eurocentric discipline, the third strand of Global IR’s critical precursors – postcolonial approaches – does not share the primary goal of a more pluralistic discipline and better representation of non-Western subjects. These approaches do not wish IR to become more holistic and representative by covering a bigger universe of cases. Rather, their focus is on revealing how global power structures shape international politics and on understanding the conditions of possibility for moving beyond them.44

Postcolonial approaches therefore highlight the need to understand and reveal difference rather than to erase it in analyses.45 Such scholarship exposes the politics of difference underlying supposedly universal IR theories and highlights the imperialist histories on which IR is based.46 Rather than including ‘non-Western’ perspectives in a ‘Western’ canon and in so doing glossing over real divisions in an attempt to stage a dialogue between supposed equals,47 postcolonial approaches aim at uncovering the violence with which these international structures suppress and marginalise along the lines of empires to this day – both in academia and in day-to-day politics.

These critics therefore hold that to ‘globalise’ the universe of cases without changing the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research bears the risk of reifying rather than uncovering power relations in the international system.48 In fact, the inclusion of other perspectives within the given parameters of the discipline is more likely to distort findings because difference is only superficially captured and the underlying

41. Shani, ‘Toward a Post-Western IR’.
42. Pinar Bilgin, ‘Opening up International Relations, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love “Non-Western IR”’, in The Handbook of Critical International Relations, ed. Steven Roach (London: Edward Elgar, 2020), 12–28.
43. Vasilaki, ‘Provincialising IR?’.
44. Agathangelou and Ling, Transforming World Politics; Vivienne Jabri, The Postcolonial Subject. Claiming Politics/Governing Others in Late Modernity (London: Routledge, 2013); Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney, eds., Claiming the International (London: Routledge, 2013).
45. David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, International Relations and the Problem of Difference (London: Routledge, 2004). Hobson, The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics; Robbie Shilliam, ed., International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity (London: Routledge, 2011); Zeynep G. Capan, ‘Decolonising International Relations?’, Third World Quarterly 38, no. 1 (2017): 1–15.
46. Roxanne Doty, Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
47. Fierke and Jabri, ‘Global Conversations’.
48. Kamola, ‘IR, the Critic, and the World’.
processes of interaction across differences are not understood.49 Thus, Charlotte Epstein diagnoses the desire to universalise as a core problem in IR. In the absence of a critical analysis of its underlying power structures, ‘the universal shifts from being an epistemological ideal […] to a normative ideal’,50 or, as Tzvetan Todorov puts it, the social sciences blend ‘the identification of our own values with values in general, of our I with the universe – in the conviction that the world is one’.51 The postcolonial perspective therefore goes further than the above critique of IR’s narrow geographical focus and highlights the problematic extrapolation of what are allegedly ‘general’ rules from partial experiences, where ‘the rest’ can only be conceived of as deviating from those rules.

To sum up, these critical precursors of Global IR are strongly interdependent but have developed in different directions. While ‘non-Western’ IR exposed IR as a Western science, asserting the need to add ‘non-Western’ perspectives and become more pluralistic, ‘post-Western’ perspectives aim to overcome the tendency to use non-Western countries as the testing ground for concepts developed in ‘the West’, arguing that generalisable concepts to develop genuinely universal theories can be derived from anywhere in the world. Postcolonial critiques adopt a similarly critical view of IR’s Eurocentrism and parochialism, but entail a more fundamental critique of universality and power relations.52 In postcolonial critique, the assumption is not that there is a given world out there and IR only has to become more pluralistic to better represent that world. In contrast, these critiques examine how specific representations themselves create worlds and uphold power structures – in other words, they are centred on an entirely different understanding of conducting social inquiry.53 This field of scholarship was both the requisite condition for Acharya to be able to present his idea of a global IR and the context in which he entered the debate with his call for this new project. While these three critiques cannot be clearly separated in practice and some authors have actually contributed to all of them, this distinction will contribute to a clearer understanding of what we demonstrate in the following sections: Global IR only partially utilised these critiques, a decision which has had unfavourable consequences.

The Global IR Agenda

The idea of Global IR, as formulated by Amitav Acharya, fundamentally builds on these long-standing critiques of IR’s parochialism. But Global IR is deliberately defined by its
non-prescriptive, open, and inclusive character, as an agenda of doing IR in a multiplex and globalised world. It is an ‘aspiration for greater inclusiveness and diversity’ rather than a ready-made programme for studying, researching, or writing about IR.\textsuperscript{54}

Acharya nevertheless defined six main dimensions on which Global IR is based. First, the idea of ‘pluralistic universalism’, which – instead of searching for or claiming to have ‘one-size-fits-all’ concepts – ‘allows us to view the world of IR as a large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations’.\textsuperscript{55} A ‘pluralistic universalism’ thus recognises and embraces diversity. Second, Global IR is grounded in world history as opposed to Western or European history, with the aim of deriving concepts and theories from specific historical experiences, ideas, institutions, and intellectual perspectives of Western and non-Western societies alike.\textsuperscript{56} The key challenge Acharya identifies in this regard is to ‘develop concepts and approaches from non-Western contexts on their own terms and to apply them not only locally, but also to other contexts, including the larger global canvas’.\textsuperscript{57} Third, Global IR does not reject but rather subsumes existing IR theories, the authors of which are urged to ‘rethink their assumptions and broaden the scope of their investigations’.\textsuperscript{58} Fourth, Global IR is based on the assumption that regions constitute crucial sites for the study of international relations and for transcending still dominant binary imaginaries between a globalised, that is, flat and equal world, on the one hand, and one that is fractured into fixed regional blocs, on the other. Studying what Acharya calls ‘regional worlds’ also provides an opportunity to link disciplinary and area studies. In fact, Global IR is intended to synthesise these fields of study by merging theoretical interest and innovation with a strong emphasis on field research and expertise in particular contexts. Fifth, Global IR is aimed at eschewing cultural exceptionalism and parochialism by favouring comparative perspectives and the search for broader understandings of local contexts.\textsuperscript{59} And finally, Global IR is based on a broad concept of agency, which captures the diverse ways in which non-Western agency in particular is created and enacted. A Global IR account should ‘tell us how actors (state and nonstate), through their material, ideational, and interaction capabilities, construct, reject, reconstitute, and transform global and regional orders’.\textsuperscript{60} In so doing, Global IR ‘recognizes the voices and agency of the South and opens a central place for subaltern perspectives on global order and the changing dynamics of North-South relations’.\textsuperscript{61} On the basis of these six dimensions, Acharya identifies specific areas of empirical inquiry, which would provide the bedrock for Global IR to serve as a framework for ‘advancing IR toward a truly inclusive and universal discipline’.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{54} Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 649.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 649–50.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 650.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 651.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 652.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
Global IR’s Unquestioned Globalisms

If taken seriously in practice, the change Global IR calls for would come close to a genuine watershed in the way the discipline is organised and how it operates. However, as we argue in this section, this watershed is based on an accommodative and inclusive approach that prevents the formulation of a more profound critique as starting point for re-imagining the discipline. While it rightly problematises IR’s ‘Western’ perspective and the resulting mechanisms of exclusion, Global IR has so far failed to problematise the concept of the ‘global’ that it has put in place.

In contrast, as we argue in the following section, ‘the global’ in Global IR builds on unquestioned categories, which may turn the agenda into yet another ‘universal knowledge project’. To illustrate this argument, we, first, use the idea of one global knowledge canon, which Global IR aims to contribute to in a cumulative way, and second, we scrutinise the idea of a global community of IR scholars into which those who have so far been marginalised from the activities of the discipline would have to be brought in. Third, we argue that Global IR, quite surprisingly, fails to promote the empirical study of what the global is actually supposed to mean, where and by whom it is constructed, and what purposes it serves.

The imagined Global IR canon

Although Global IR is based on a critique of the prevailing ignorance of mainstream IR towards the agencies, histories, and pressing concerns of those outside of the European and US-American core, Acharya’s programme still idealises the model of one global knowledge canon. It maintains the idea of one disciplinary body of knowledge, the only difference to what is currently in place being its greater inclusiveness and representativeness of politics around the globe. This aim is pursued without significantly jeopardising IR’s disciplinary foundations and status as one discipline. This is best illustrated with the idea of ‘pluralistic universalism’. Based on Robert Cox’ critique of monistic universalism, Acharya argues that this alternative conception of universalism ‘rejects the false and politically inspired dichotomy between universalism and relativism’. Consequently, ‘pluralistic universalism allows us to view the world of IR as a large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations’. As depicted by Andrew Hurrell, Global IR is an attempt to overcome the ghettoisation and exoticism of regional studies while simultaneously pluralising IR concepts and conceptual frameworks emerging ‘out of varied regions and contexts’. This knowledge from particular contexts, however, is only considered

63. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’, 296.
64. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 14.
65. Although this does not imply that IR scholars have to subscribe to the same content or engage in one dialogue; Acharya and Buzan, The Making of Global International Relations, 299.
66. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 649.
67. Ibid., 649–50.
68. Andrew Hurrell, ‘Beyond Critique: How to Study Global IR?’, International Studies Review 18, no. 1 (2016): 149–51.
valuable to IR when it is able to prove that it can be applied to the ‘larger global canvas’ and how. Global IR hence aims to demonstrate that ‘concepts and theories derived from the non-Western or Global South contexts can also apply beyond that specific national or regional context from which they are initially derived’.

The said canvas must logically precede any specific knowledge and define its worth. This resembles the regulatory mechanisms of disciplinary IR that Wanda Vrasti observed: ‘[E]xtra-disciplinary efforts are granted a “workers’ visa” only if they conform to already-existing criteria for good research and unless they do anything to perturb the ontological imagination of the discipline’.

Acharya explicitly states that pluralistic universalism ‘does not impose any particular idea or approach on others but respects diversity while seeking common ground’. He stresses that the aim of Global IR is not to reject, overcome, or discard hitherto established theories, but to ‘subsume’ them and to challenge IR scholarship to extend its empirical radar to encompass underrepresented contexts and empirical phenomena in order to ‘enrich it with the infusion of ideas and practices from the non-Western world’. This is also the declared difference and ‘advantage’ vis-à-vis Global IR’s postcolonial predecessors, whose explicit critique and attempted disruption of the mainstream Global IR seeks to replace with an attempt to ‘draw in the broadest group of scholars’. In other words, ‘Global IR has a place for all theories [. . .]’.

Such a ‘middle-ground move’, where so far incompatible and contradictory frameworks are presented as bridgeable and such a synthesis as generally desirable, has been suggested both for major theoretical frameworks, such as constructivism, and for individual concepts, such as practices or regionalism. This move views inclusion as the highest goal of scholarship and aims to overcome rather than unpack contradictions that emanate from incompatible epistemologies and standards for what counts as ‘good’ IR knowledge. Its proponents ‘assume that it is through theoretical bridge-building of this kind that science makes progress’. Yet this assumption is a ‘grand metatheoretical wager’ because it promotes ‘a sort of intellectual potluck’ where everything is presented as potentially combinable without acknowledging that inclusion and progress, too, are always based on particular epistemological and meta-theoretical choices.

69. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 650.
70. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 14; Hurrell, ‘Beyond Critique’, 151.
71. Wanda Vrasti, ‘The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 279–301, 297.
72. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 6.
73. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 650; Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 6.
74. Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, 298.
75. Ibid., 305.
76. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, ‘International Practices’, *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (2011): 1–36.
77. Fredrik Söderbaum, *Rethinking Regionalism* (London: Palgrave, 2016).
78. Erik Ringmar, ‘The Search for Dialogue as a Hindrance to Understanding: Practices as Inter-Paradigmatic Research Program’, *International Theory* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–27, 4.
79. Ibid., 20.
Moreover, Karin Fierke and Vivienne Jabri have shown how the idea of a ‘global dialogue’\textsuperscript{80} between diverse subjects in IR has tended to treat the newly integrated cultures or regions ‘as the property of discrete cultural identities, and representatives of these cultures as the bearers of these properties’, hence fixing instead of complicating a particular perspective on ‘the world’.\textsuperscript{81}

In sum, the proposed Global IR canon that progresses through inclusion rather than confrontation circumvents an open debate about what actually counts as good IR knowledge while establishing global applicability as an unquestioned benchmark for defining the value of knowledge. It thereby contributes to further de-legitimating ‘particularity’ and re-legitimating ‘globality’ as a quality for distinguishing between good and bad IR knowledge. Moreover, by merely adding to what already exists, Global IR makes itself prone to forfeiting its critical sting to differentiate between good and bad IR knowledge.\textsuperscript{82} As argued by Peter Vale, Global IR will only become a truly novel and pluralistic enterprise if it re-engages with the questions of what the fundamental purpose of knowing is as well as whose knowledge matters.\textsuperscript{83}

By circumventing these questions, the Global IR agenda also glosses over much of the more fundamental critique that many of its predecessors, especially those from a postcolonial perspective, had previously produced. These works not only criticised how mainstream IR had ignored the histories and agencies of most of the Global South but also engaged more fundamentally with the epistemological and meta-theoretical barriers that served to reproduce the discipline’s neglect of these issues in the first place.\textsuperscript{84} Ole Wæver and Arlene Tickner, for instance, offer a concise account of the exclusionary effects of the particular way in which IR perceives and treats its theoretical canon as both an entry point and a selection scheme to distinguish good from bad IR knowledge.\textsuperscript{85} In this regard, Navnita Behera suggests a different solution to the particularity/globality problem. She argues that Global IR needs a novel knowledge-building enterprise, one that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{80} Acharya and Buzan, \textit{The Making of Global International Relations}, 299.
\textsuperscript{81} Fierke and Jabri, \textit{Global conversations}, 7; see also Murray, ‘Imperial Dialectics and Epistemic Mapping’. See also J. Ann Tickner, ‘Dealing with Difference: Problems and Possibilities for Dialogue in International Relations’, \textit{Millennium: Journal of International Studies} 39, no. 3 (2011): 607–18, 617; J. Ann Tickner, ‘Knowledge Is Power: Challenging IR’s Eurocentric Narrative’, \textit{International Studies Review} 18, no. 1 (2016): 157–59.
\textsuperscript{82} Peter Katzenstein in fact makes a more specific argument about the plurality of such benchmarks by arguing that the aim should be to ‘disagree forcefully in one shared language’, which requires ‘more intellectual empathy and capacious thought’ (Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘Diversity and Empathy’, \textit{International Studies Review} 18, no. 1 (2016): 151–53).
\textsuperscript{83} Peter Vale, ‘Inclusion and Exclusion’, \textit{International Studies Review} 18, no. 1 (2016): 159–62, 161.
\textsuperscript{84} Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling, ‘The House of IR: From Family Power Politics to the Poisies of Worldism’, \textit{International Studies Review} 6, no. 4 (2004): 21–49.
\textsuperscript{85} Wæver and Tickner, \textit{International Relations Scholarship around the World}; Arlene B. Tickner, ‘Core, Periphery and (Neo)imperialist International Relations’, 635–37.
\end{flushright}
merely explaining or finding out the extent to which the ‘particular’ ‘fits in’ with the ‘general’ [. . .].86

This suggestion clearly diverges from Global IR’s global applicability condition as an unquestioned benchmark for defining worth within IR. As a consequence, it challenges the accommodative way the Global IR agenda addresses questions of epistemology and meta-theory as well as its delineation of boundaries to define what counts as valuable knowledge within and for IR scholarship.

While Acharya acknowledges that these fundamental challenges to the discipline are important for paving the way for Global IR, they are also degraded as ‘first generation’ contributions whose main purpose is said to be merely critique.87 Global IR, in turn, aims to move ‘beyond critique’, as Andrew Hurrell phrased it, by demonstrating how knowledge from the hitherto marginalised parts of the world does indeed matter to IR scholars.88 However, this comes at the expense of leaving the benchmarks that define what is of value untouched or making them vague at best.

The imagined Global IR community of scholars

The second unquestioned globalism of Global IR is the promotion of an imagined community of IR scholars. Responding to the critique that the discipline’s key conferences, journals, and textbooks are disproportionately dominated by scholars from the United States and Western Europe,89 the aim of Global IR is to dismantle the gatekeeping barriers and make IR more inclusive, not only with regard to the themes and questions it addresses but also in relation to the people contributing to the discipline. Thus, by ‘bringing in’ more scholars from the Global South, Global IR seeks to meet its promise of becoming a ‘truly inclusive and universal discipline’.90 To this end, several authors have suggested ways of addressing and ultimately overcoming the various gatekeeping structures that are seen as the cause of this exclusion: in order to overcome language barriers, Shiping Tang, for instance, suggests that journals offer additional editorial support for non-English native speakers before they submit their articles.91 Others would like to see more support for publications in languages other than English.92 Recomposing the editorial boards of the discipline’s key journals and

86. Navnita C. Behera, ‘Knowledge Production’, *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 153–57, 154.
87. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 14.
88. Hurrell, ‘Beyond Critique’.
89. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory: An Introduction’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (2007): 341–70; Jonas Hagmann and Thomas J. Biersteker, ‘Beyond the Published Discipline: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of International Studies’, *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2014): 291–315.
90. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 5.
91. Shipping Tang, ‘Practical Concerns and Power Considerations’, *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 162–63.
92. Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory’; Vale, ‘Inclusion and Exclusion’.
strengthening regional flagship journals to ‘encourage diversity in approaches and methods’ are other suggestions.93 New ISA funding schemes that support workshops with participation predominantly from the Global South and ISA conferences held in the Global South are further possible measures.

Apart from being based on potentially essentialist understandings of representation, these proposals seem to ignore the fact that scholars around the world work under very different conditions and have quite distinct and diverging perceptions of their own work, their role as academics in society, and their identity as IR scholars.94 By merely seeking to ‘bring them in’, these strategies are liable to produce no more than cosmetic change rather than a profound transformation of the way the community of IR scholars is composed. Genuine inclusion would require challenging established power structures that define how the discipline is organised and who sets its agenda.95 The effects of merely acknowledging diversity will thus only be superficial as long as diversity fails to impact the underlying power structures that shape the global community. We are certainly not denying the potential of such measures to have transformative effects, which are dependent on the actions of multiple actors and what they do with the possibilities offered and conditions set by such measures. However, what we underline here is the lack of a visible strategy to have such an effect – in other words, it is unclear whether these measures were intended to realise such transformative potential in the first place.96

Moreover, ‘bringing them in’ suggests that scholars from marginalised parts of the world actually want to be included in the global discipline. In fact, insights generated by the International Relations Scholarship around the World project cast doubt on this: for instance, because scholars around the world have different understandings of the relationship between politics and academia and their own identity as scholars, or because their work as academics is subject to different structural pressures that make participation in the dominant rituals of the discipline costly, dangerous, or even useless.97

As with the discipline’s knowledge canon (see above), the community of IR scholars is prior and assumed as given before the Global IR project starts. Against this background, it seems to be more likely that the ‘truly inclusive and universal discipline’98 will be based on the empowerment of hitherto marginalised scholars through ‘disciplining’, that is, making them fit for the global discipline rather than on challenging the discipline’s identity, power centres, and modes of working through the contributions of ‘others’. After all, it is about bringing ‘them’ ‘in’.

93. Tang, ‘Practical Concerns and Power Considerations’, 163.
94. Wæver and Tickner, International Relations Scholarship around the World; Alejandro, Western Dominance in International Relations?, Chapter 2.
95. Tickner, ‘Core, Periphery and (Neo)imperialist International Relations’, 642.
96. We are grateful to one of our anonymous reviewers for pointing us towards this clarification.
97. Wæver and Tickner, International Relations Scholarship around the World; Alejandro, Western Dominance in International Relations?, Chapter 6; Acharya and Buzan, ‘Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory’, 296–99; Jochen Kleinschmidt, ‘Global IR and Academic Authorship in Latin America: Why Inclusion Is Not a Panacea’, October 31, 2016. Available at: https://trafo.hypotheses.org/5369 (accessed September 25, 2020).
98. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 5.
The failure to problematise globalisms

Besides the two aforementioned globalisms in the way Global IR imagines IR’s knowledge canon and scholarly community, it seems surprising that, as an empirical phenomenon, globalisms as such are largely overlooked in Acharya’s six dimensions of Global IR. Acknowledging and problematising globalisms in the study of international politics would include at least two elements: first, the question of how the imaginary of the global came into being and use, that is, how globalisms were constructed historically and how they are sustained in today’s world; second, on the basis of such an analysis, the key question would be to what effect this imaginary can and has been utilised. It is not our intention to simply add these to Acharya’s six thematic areas for a Global IR research agenda. Rather, we argue that if Global IR is to deliver on its promise to be less arrogant, less ahistorical, and less exclusionary, it seems paramount for these two questions to be addressed to develop an understanding of how this exclusion has been achieved and with what effects.

This failure to problematise the global is due to Global IR’s treatment of the concept as ontological fact rather than as social imaginary. As we already laid out in the introduction, a social imaginary is a pre-reflexive framework that is, despite its intangibility, ‘real’ in that it makes common practices and communal attachments possible. It is ‘neither a theory nor an ideology, but an implicit “background” that makes possible communal practices and a widely shared sense of their legitimacy’.99 Postcolonial scholars have highlighted the coincidence of the Western colonial expansion and a ‘global’ imaginary or, in Walter Mignolo’s words, ‘the building of the Atlantic imaginary, which will become the imaginary of the modern/colonial world’.100 Yet in Global IR, the ‘global’ remains unchallenged; it is the basic given of this research agenda. We find this starting point almost paradoxical for the stated purpose of Global IR. Problematising global imaginaries, how they work, and what effects they have is therefore paramount for Global IR to succeed. In the following section, we outline some elements of such an empirical-analytical agenda for Global IR in which the problematisation of the global is the core task. We also discuss how such an empirical-analytical agenda could be linked back to our first point of critique in this section, that is, Global IR’s own unquestioned globalisms.

How to Problematise ‘the Global’ in Global IR?

We have argued that it is not enough to simply add more views to the IR canon to ‘truly reflect the global society we live in today’.101 The perils of such a cumulative approach can be seen in a similar debate on globalising sociology where Gurminder Bhambra has instructively shown the shortcomings of such an attempt which is justified with an empirical analysis of factual globalisation. Just as we have shown in the case of Global IR, Bhambra observes a trend in sociology towards globalising the

99. Steger, ‘The Rise of the Global Imaginary’, 6.
100. Walter Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Design. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.
101. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 647.
canon by adding perspectives and experiences from the non-Western world. She unveils the argumentative move underlying this expansion of the canon, which often analyses globalisation as ‘a recent phenomenon’, leading to the ‘global age’ we currently live in. Just like Global IR, the authors contributing to this analysis hence claim that sociology’s theoretical canon needs to be adapted (i.e. globalised) in line with this recent globalisation in the real world. Bhambra, in contrast, argues that the world had ‘always already’ been global and that the classical social theories, which had not taken into account this empirical fact of interconnectedness (due to their Eurocentrism), were, in effect, wrong. Therefore, it would be inadequate to simply add some non-Western perspectives to the canon: ‘Any transformation is only subsequent to the present; it is not a transformed understanding of how we got to the present’. Since the world has been interconnected for centuries, the canon needs to be globalised, not by adding perspectives from a newly globalised world but by questioning the very categories with which sociologists operate (since these were derived from Eurocentric theory-building). In other words, inclusion without transformation is a false promise and only superficially expands a canon that is inadequate in a world that has always already been global.

We believe that a similar critique can be made of Global IR’s cumulative approach: if we are serious about globalising IR, we need to start by addressing the shortcomings of the previous approach to theorising the world which has always already been interconnected. Global IR therefore needs to transform the Eurocentric theories of the past rather than build on them. Yet, going beyond Bhambra’s critique, we believe that it will be necessary not only to accept ‘the global’ as a long-term historical fact but to ask where these globalisms come from, who has constructed them, and for what purpose. In other words, we think that the global cannot only be an empirical-analytical category but has an ideological dimension, too. Of course, no category is ever purely analytical or ideological. For this reason, a reflexive approach would always try to uncover the ideological dimension in categories that are supposedly analytical, both when analysing empirical data and when creating one’s own categories. In Global IR, the increasing ‘globalisation’ of the world has so far almost exclusively been understood as an analytical lens, while the ideological underpinnings of the very rise of the global as an analytical category have received less attention. We propose this ideological dimension of the global as a future research agenda for a transformative Global IR. As we have argued, such an agenda for Global IR should, first and foremost, problematise the global imaginary in both an empirical-analytical and a self-reflexive dimension. Thus, problematising the global could take different paths, extending the line of inquiry in several directions. To illustrate, and serving as a starting point, in the following section, we suggest three broad themes for further exploration: First, how did the global imaginary come into being, and how has it been put to use by different actors and groups? Second, what social effects, with regard to the distribution of power and wealth, do such globalisms have? And third, how can IR scholars conduct a reflexive inquiry into globalisms?

102. Bhambra, *Connected Sociologies*, 144.
103. Ibid., 145.
The construction and use of globalisms

In the History of Political Thought, the emergence and spread of globalisms have been subject to comprehensive scholarly inquiry. In his noteworthy analysis of the origins of neoliberalism as an intellectual and political project, Quinn Slobodian, for instance, shows how a group of (mostly) Austrian economists – the globalists – managed to diffuse their rather marginal economic theories into the mainstream of international economic policymaking by invoking both an explicitly global intellectual horizon and a plan of action, succeeding with their concerted effort to infiltrate and change institutions including Western governments, the League of Nations, and finally the World Trade Organization (WTO).104 While not contradicting this analysis, in her study of British and American thinking about the future of world order in the 1940s, Or Rosenboim reconstructs how ‘globalism’ in fact entailed conflictive and even contradictory frameworks.105 Building on intellectual biographies, she not only disputes the standard IR narrative about a succession from Wilsonian idealism to Realism but also shows a ‘complex and nonlinear genealogy of globalism in mid-century visions of world order’.106 The globalisms she reconstructs do not comprise unified ideological frameworks but rather ‘a growing sensitivity to a particular dimension of politics’, which Rosenboim defines as global, that is, ‘a perspective on politics, a sometimes abstract space that was modified, redefined, and challenged in lively transnational conversations’.107 The rise of this global perspective not only served as an alternative to empire but also reflected a growing concern for the future of democracy and the idea of a pluralistic world order. The globalism Rosenboim reconstructs can therefore be described as a shared imaginary which – as she shows – increasingly structures the debates of 20th-century international politics.

Manfred Steger similarly reconstructs the ‘global imaginary’ and traces how, historically, a ‘new sense of “the global” began to undermine the normality and self-contained cosiness of the modern nation-state’.108 The global became the frame of reference through both ‘objective’ acceleration of material networks and ‘the intensifying “subjective” recognition of a shrinking world’.109 This strongly influenced new ideologies in the 1960s (on the left and right) and culminated in the 1990s in ‘market globalism’ (neoliberal networks with the aim of globalising markets), on the one hand, and ‘justice globalism’ (global justice movements in response to market globalism), on the other.110 Globalisation therefore became a dominant metaphor for elites around the world – elites who did not share an ideology but all increasingly imagined themselves within a global frame of reference. Steger’s study is illuminating in the way it shows how the imaginary of the global creeps into ideologies as diverse as neoliberalism, social justice activism, and

104. Quinn Slobodian, The Globalists. The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
105. Or Rosenboim, The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
106. Rosenboim, The Emergence of Globalism, 2.
107. Ibid., 3.
108. Steger, The Rise of the Global Imaginary, 10–11.
109. Steger, The Rise of the Global Imaginary, 11.
110. Steger, Globalism: The New Market Ideology.
The seemingly non-ideological character of the global imaginary has thus been incorporated by these ideologies, but more than that: they have been transformed by, or even only became possible in their current form because of the global imaginary, which, therefore, solidifies into something more fixed over time.

We have introduced these works as illustrative examples to show that there are already useful ways of inquiring into the construction and use of globalisms that do not start by taking the global as a given, but examine the emergent, contingent, and political processes leading to such outcomes. While these works mostly hail from outside IR, IR scholarship could benefit tremendously from following similar paths and addressing the manifold questions this field has so far left open.

What Global IR could contribute to this field is, first and foremost, to develop better diagnostic tools for detecting and reconstructing various projects of the global: Who perceives the global as a given and who does not? How do different imaginaries of the global correlate and interact with, or even constitute class, race, gender, geographical location, and different forms of capital? An inquiry into the uneven and combined existence of globalisms, and their historicity and geography could be a field where IR scholars can make a difference, rising above lazy intellectual categories such the ‘globalist elite’ versus the ‘nationalist working class’. Global IR would be an ideal starting point for nuanced studies of where global imaginaries come from, how they travel, and in what ways they affect political discourses and practices. This could, second, also lead to more appropriate instruments of normative evaluation and judgement: If globalisms are neither just assumed as givens nor perceived as sinister projects, the evaluation and critique of globalisms also need to be more specific. To give one brief example: In a review essay of Slobodian’s book, Wolfgang Streeck uses the analysis of neoliberal globalists to argue against ‘globalism’ itself and to advocate for a left-wing nationalist project. A Global IR approach as we imagine would go beyond such simple associations of ‘the global’ with a particular ideology and analyse the impact of the emergence of globalisms on different political projects. The global imaginary as one of the conditions of possibility for both authoritarian neoliberalism and the transnational resistance to oppressive governments and internationally organised austerity is the starting point for such an approach to the global. This entails conducting a recursive analysis of the reproduction of particular globalisms in the study of the global, a task which Global IR has yet to deliver on.

**The power effects of globalisms**

Beyond exploring the emergence and making of globalisms, we suggest a second theme IR scholars could focus on as part of an agenda to problematise the global: that is, what effects globalisms have regarding the distribution of power and wealth and the formation or transformation of power relationships. Here, IR scholars could draw on, but
significantly expand on, some already-existing works. For instance, some excellent work has already been done on the question of what effects specific spatial imaginaries have on the distribution of power and wealth. In his book on the politics of expertise, for example, Ole Jacob Sending traces the historical emergence of international rule. He does so by showing how an imaginary of the international is constructed as a proto-objective structure of rule through the performance of its realness.\footnote{Ole Jacob Sending, \textit{The Politics of Expertise. Competing for Authority in Global Governance} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).} The international, formerly loosely defined as everything that happens between states, is unfettered and deepens into ‘a social space distinct from the sum total of states’ interests’.\footnote{Ibid., 33.} The international as a field was henceforth constructed by specific actors – lawyers, civil servants, and so on – alongside their display of competence over this very field: ‘While the claim to authority of international civil servants was initially over fairly specific and circumscribed tasks, it paved the way for a considerable expansion [of their object of governance]’.\footnote{Ibid., 33–34.} While Sending is concerned with the international rather than the global, his analysis is informative in that it discusses the ways in which such imaginaries are constructed and how their effects can be traced. What is more, he shows convincingly ‘what we gain by not taking established categories [such as the international or the global] as our starting point’.\footnote{Ibid., 34.} His reconstruction of the Paris Peace Conference and the role of the emergent profession of the international civil servant is therefore a good example of methodology: it traces historically situated actors’ (especially lawyers’) practices and the ways in which they wanted to ‘legislate [peace] into existence’.\footnote{Irwin Abrams, ‘The Emergence of the International Law Societies’, \textit{Review of Politics} 19, no. 3 (1957): 361–80, as cited in Sending, \textit{The Politics of Expertise}, 37; insertion by Sending.} They undertook this project by claiming to represent the international, and in so doing brought into existence both the specific design of the UN Secretariat and the international as its object of governance.\footnote{Sending, \textit{The Politics of Expertise}, 53.} Sending’s approach therefore has a twofold significance for our purpose: it problematises and reconstructs an imaginary which – like the global imaginary – others take for granted. Furthermore, he also demonstrates what this reconstruction explains – in other words, who is able to enact and benefit from this imaginary and what effects it has on order and the distribution of power and wealth in international politics.

Despite these existing works, IR scholarship could still contribute more to advancing our understanding of the power effects of globalisms. Two areas seem particularly pertinent in this regard: the monetisation of claims to the global (economic power effects of globalisms) and the self-authorisation of international organisations (IOs) through claims to the global (political power effects of globalisms). First, the global can be monetised by very specific people and businesses with the infrastructure to stylise themselves as ‘global’. Take, for instance, ‘Global Experiences’,\footnote{See https://www.globalexperiences.com (accessed September 30, 2020).} an internship program which invites you to ‘join our community of over 8,000 global alumni’ and promises that these ‘global
alumni get jobs $3 \times$ faster than the national average!’. This global experience requires a ‘tuition fee’ of US$7000–US$12,000 for 12 weeks, an unaffordable global experience for most people around the world. We are concerned that, in academia, a similar phenomenon may be on the rise. On the one hand, we are seeing academics with the social and political capital to frame their research and experience as ‘global’, increasing their chances of success in the publishing market and in the competition for funding, while, on the other hand, there are those from less wealthy institutions who have to settle for a more humble framing of potentially similar research, in effect making them potentially less attractive for publishers and funding agencies.120

Second, in terms of the political power effects of globalisms, recent transformations in IOs are a case in point. Despite differences between them, IOs have, to an impressive degree, incorporated the global imaginary in their very institutional identities, shaping IOs’ everyday work. This becomes evident in their self-descriptions of what they are – ‘the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations’ (WTO) or ‘a unique global partnership’ (World Bank Group), as well as in their descriptions of what they do – addressing ‘global problems like corruption’ (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)) or ‘the global environmental agenda’ (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)). Important, yet so far underexplored questions here are how and with what effects globalisms function as a governing meta-structure within IOs (e.g. with regard to power inequalities and hierarchies among IO members) as well as how claims to the global may lend legitimacy to particular political agendas within IOs. To problematise these globalisms in IOs would require IR scholars to study the power effects of such imaginaries, transcending simplistic understandings of who benefits from them, that is, developing a more fine-grained understanding of gains and losses through the everyday effects of globalisms. This could, in turn, also lead to a more explicit investigation into how globalisms can be used both as an instrument of control and one of subversion and resistance.

**Towards a reflexive problematisation of the global**

We have outlined two empirical-analytical fields of inquiry that we consider promising for a Global IR that problematises globalisms rather than accepting ‘the global’ as a given. We have highlighted that placing the global centre stage requires more than just adding a new focus to the discipline’s empirical-analytical agenda and also needs to go beyond a longue durée perspective on globalisation. This is where our critique of Global IR transcends Bhambra’s critique of global sociology. Finally, therefore, we would like to emphasise that not only is the global as a category useful as a description of

120. A counterintuitive example is Hanrieder’s work on global health where the label legitimates specific medical practices within the United States that had been designed for the ‘Global South’ originally. See Tine Hanrieder, ‘How Do Professions Globalize? Lessons from the Global South in US Medical Education’, *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 3 (2019): 296–314.
the actually existing globalisation in the world (empirical-analytical value) but has an ideological dimension, as well. In fact, only by engaging with how the global imaginary has been constructed can we understand how the global is constructed in IR itself, including in Global IR.\textsuperscript{121} Such a reflexive agenda for Global IR could trigger the necessary disciplinary transformations that were already immanent in Global IR’s critical precursors but have so far not been adequately addressed in Global IR, potentially leading to reification instead of transformation.\textsuperscript{122}

We therefore propose that an investigation into the global should take into account the construction of global imaginaries in the process of knowledge production and also the normative pressures that result from such a process – particularly for those scholars who are being ‘included’ in this discourse. If ‘others’ are to be ‘included’, the discursive and material structure they are being included into should be subject to scrutiny, in so doing countering the fallacies of projecting the own experience of the world as a ‘global perspective’.\textsuperscript{123}

In research practice, such a reflexive problematisation of the global would, in effect, not equate empirical claims to the global with descriptions of globality. For example, ‘global’ projects such as the ‘Global Justice Movement’ usually express an aspiration to universal equality, but precisely one that criticises the claims to supposedly existing global representation in IOs. They communicate this aspiration without themselves claiming to represent ‘the globe’. Consider an example: The British social justice organisation ‘Global Justice Now’ makes frequent references to ‘the globe’ or ‘the world’, but it does so in a language that is aspirational rather than representational, that is, the organisation fights for global justice without claiming privileged access to a ‘global perspective’. Rather to the contrary, the three main activities ‘Global Justice Now’ undertakes are to amplify the voices of activists from other countries, to forge a community for change ‘here in Britain’, and to ‘use our influence as UK citizens to change UK government policy and counter the power of big business’.\textsuperscript{124} The network does not claim to represent the globe or even movements in other countries but rather strives for ‘global justice’ from the humble position of trying to understand and amplify voices for the context that they have the capacity to influence. This is a different usage of the global than the one we described above with reference to the World Bank Group and the WTO, which perform globality as a representational gesture: Based on the work of its ‘Global Indicators Group’, for instance, the World Bank feels comfortable making statements about how things are globally. This gives them a great deal of authority over all things global, which, in turn, enables representational claims. Although both types of actor make claims to the global, we believe that a reflexive Global IR would be better suited to situate those claims and to explain their different position vis à vis what they imagine as the global, and the extent to which these respective imaginaries have contributed to the unequal

\textsuperscript{121} We are grateful to one anonymous reviewer for this clarification.
\textsuperscript{122} Kamola, ‘IR, the Critic, and the World’.
\textsuperscript{123} Alejandro, \textit{Western Dominance in International Relations?}, 11.
\textsuperscript{124} https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/we-campaign-social-and-economic-justice (accessed September 14, 2020).
distribution of resources in international politics, including the very capacity to speak on behalf of ‘the global’. Furthermore, Global IR itself needs to engage in a process of reflexive self-examination to ensure it does not slip into using globality as a representational gesture, that it does not perform globality and in so doing reifies a rather restricted view of what this could mean.

This reflexive approach to the global would, we believe, fundamentally affect the character of Global IR as it is currently practised, but, as a result, it would also come closer to truly changing ‘the way that we study, publish, and discuss IR’.125 Nevertheless, even based on a reflexive problematisation of the global, there are limits to the Global IR framework. As Hamati-Ataya has argued, there is, within the discourse on reflexivity in IR, a ‘tendency to resort to well-rehearsed debates at the highest levels of abstraction [which] has raised doubts about the usefulness of reflexive scholarship and its flirtation with meta-theoretical dead ends’.126 The ‘reflexive turn’,127 whose purpose we see as preventing reification, can thus become an artefact in itself, particularly within a discourse as hyper-abstract as ‘the global’. Hence, a reflexive problematisation of the global could become a contradictory endeavour, advancing reflexivity for its own sake and thus losing touch with its initial purpose. Yet, while there is no guarantee of completely avoiding such tendencies, for the reasons outlined above, we believe that, if based on a self-reflexive problematisation of the global, Global IR still promises to be an avenue for changing the mainstream of IR towards a less parochial, less Western-centric, and more open discipline, particularly when this reflexivity is used as a reminder to actually alter the material conditions under which the globalisms on the basis of which IR operates have been produced.

**Conclusion**

Amitav Acharya developed the agenda of Global IR with the aim of ‘advancing IR toward a truly inclusive and universal’ discipline.128 Against the background of long-standing postcolonial and other critical engagements with IR’s parochialism, we formulated a friendly critique of this agenda by focusing on Global IR’s unquestioned globalisms, on the one hand, and its failure to promote the empirical investigation of globalisms, on the other. Together, the unquestioned globalisms run counter to Global IR’s stated aims and prevent a more thorough engagement with the boundaries defining worth in IR scholarship. As a result, Global IR is at risk of becoming yet another ‘universal knowledge project’129 that uses ambiguous and invisible normative benchmarks yet claims openness and inclusivity.

125. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 649.
126. Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘Crafting the Reflexive Gaze: Knowledge of Knowledge in the Social Worlds of International Relations’, in The SAGE Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations, eds. Andreas Gofas, Inanna Hamati-Ataya and Nicholas Onuf (London: SAGE), 15.
127. Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘Reflectivity, Reflexivity, Reflexivism: IR’s “Reflexive Turn” – and Beyond’, European Journal of International Relations 19, no. 4 (2013): 669–94.
128. Acharya, ‘Advancing Global IR’, 5.
129. Tickner, ‘Seeing IR Differently’, 296.
Consequently, we proposed that IR scholars should focus on problematising rather than assuming the global as an analytical category. Investigating the global means problematising the global imaginary and making it a subject of empirical inquiry, both in terms of how it is created and by whom and in terms of its (economic and political) power effects. While, as we have shown, several authors within and beyond IR have demonstrated the value-added of such a perspective, we also identified crucial questions with regard to both the construction and effects of globalisms that IR scholars have so far rarely addressed. Though not a conclusive or comprehensive empirical-analytical agenda, research along these lines of inquiry could be a valid starting point for placing the questioning of the global at the centre of the discipline’s work.

With these suggestions for a thorough empirical problematisation of the global, we have highlighted that ‘the global’ also has an important ideological component, which the agenda of Global IR, as developed by Acharya, has so far failed to come to terms with. We have argued that, as a result of its failure to promote the empirical scrutiny of the construction and effects of globalisms, Global IR is also missing an important opportunity for critical reflection on its own effects. In addition to the empirical-analytical agenda, we have therefore also made the case for a more self-reflexive investigation of ‘the global’, focusing on the extent to which the aim of making IR ‘more global’ may also be contributing to the reification and ideological determination of a specific global imaginary. While not an end in itself, such self-reflexive treatment of the global is crucial in order to overcome what we identified in this article as Global IR’s unquestioned globalisms, which have, so far, diminished the transformative potential of the Global IR agenda. We recognised that there are limits to what can be achieved with reflexivity. To problematise the global should therefore not remain an intellectual endeavour solely comprising self-reflexivity. Scholars must simultaneously work towards changing the material conditions of possibility to effect transformations in practice.

Our friendly critique of Global IR thus also pointed to the crucial role of ‘disciplining’ as mechanism to change ‘the way that we study, publish, and discuss IR’.130 We discussed this, for instance, with regard to the need for those not yet ‘in’ the discipline to be ‘brought in’, but on terms that have already been set, and also with regard to the global knowledge canon that continues to serve as a benchmark for defining value in the discipline’s knowledge output. With all its good and welcome intentions, in its current formulation, Global IR therefore remains a programme for saving and reconstituting IR as a discipline and is thus itself forced to draw on ‘disciplining’ as a key means to reach this goal. This not only reveals the inherently political character of the Global IR project but also points to the contradictions inherent in its own ideals. Identifying these contradictions and making them a subject of critical collective debate could be a starting point to not only remedy Global IR’s empirical-analytical blindness towards the effects of globalisms but also to retrench their constitutive role for the discipline itself.

130. Acharya, ‘Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds’, 649.
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