Differing about Difference: Relational IR from around the World

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Abstract: Difference, a central concern to the study of international relations (IR), has not had its ontological foundations adequately disrupted. This forum explores how existential assumptions rooted in relational logics provide a significantly distinct set of tools that drive us to re-orient how we perceive, interpret, and engage both similarity and difference. Taking their cues from cosmological commitments originating in the Andes, South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East, the six contributions explore how our existential assumptions affect the ways in which we deal with difference as theorists, researchers, and teachers. This initial conversation pinpoints key content and foci of future relational work in IR.

Resumen: Las bases ontológicas de la diferencia, uno de los principales temas que se abordan en el estudio de las relaciones internacionales, no han sido cuestionadas lo suficiente. En este foro, exploramos cómo las presuposiciones existenciales arraigadas a la lógica relacional proveen un conjunto de herramientas completamente distinto que nos permite percibir, interpretar y relacionar la similitud y la diferencia de otra forma. Tomando como referencia las cosmovivencias encontradas en los Andes, Asia del Sur, Asia Oriental y Oriente Medio, en las seis colaboraciones se analiza cómo las hipótesis existenciales influyen en la forma en la que estudiamos la diferencia como teóricos, investigadores y docentes. En esta primera

conversación, se señala el contenido fundamental y el centro de atención del futuro trabajo relacional en el ámbito de las RR. II.

Extrait: Les bases ontologiques de la différence, l'une des principales préoccupations de l'étude des relations internationales, n'avaient jusqu'ici pas été décomposées de manière adéquate. Cette tribune presse explore la façon dont les suppositions existentielles ancrées dans les logiques relationnelles offrent un ensemble d'outils considérablement distincts et nous incitent à réorienter la manière dont nous percevons, interprétons et approchons à la fois la similarité et la différence. Les six essais examinent la façon dont nos paris existentiels affectent les manières dont nous traitons la différence en tant que théoriciens, chercheurs et enseignants en s'appuyant sur des points de repère issus d'engagements cosmologiques intervenant dans les Andes, en Asie du Sud, en Asie de l'Est et dans le Moyen-Orient. Ce premier échange a permis d'identifier les principaux contenus et axes du futur travail relationnel dans les relations internationales.

Differing about Difference: An Introduction

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Security, war, peace, globalization, states, international organizations, world order, international law: whether "real" things, processes, or theoretical orientations characteristic of the study of international relations (IR), all rest upon assumptions about the Other, in particular the different Other. This supposition, in turn, is rooted in the discipline of IR's ontological commitment to separation as the fundamental condition of existence, which leads us to see the world as consisting of bounded, fixed entities that boast existential autonomy. The resulting ontological panorama reinforces an "either–or" logic that hierarchically places elements in order for them to make sense to one another. Through this lens, opposites are therefore interpreted in terms of superiority and inferiority and ultimately that which is different is otherized and perceived as an existential threat.[1] One of the main tendencies of the binary dynamic described is that it spurs the drive to dominate, which runs quite counter to the discipline's overall goals of fostering peace and decreasing conflict.

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[1] Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) provide various illustrations of how this has been the case historically and within the discipline of IR, and they even speculate that the stiffest opposition to their efforts to connect theoretically with IR "was Western culture's experience with difference itself, a power stream of which has treated difference as a kind of degeneration of God's original perfection" (viii).

As a collective committed to "doing IR differently,"[2] we believe that this situation calls for revisiting the many extant strategies on hand for addressing difference and similarity (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, 23; see also Tickner and Wæver 2009; Tickner and Blaney 2012; Behr 2014). Specifically, we propose altering our most basic existential assumptions as a potentially more constructive approach. An ontological switch at the foundational level constitutes a distinct form of worlding (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 42–45), as it changes the bases on which existence is engaged, and thus begets markedly distinct logics. When we shift to assuming interconnection as the primordial condition of existence, relations are seen first and what are typically seen as separate categories through a separation-based lens are now understood as components of and secondary to relation. In this way, similarity and difference are understood as complementary opposites bound together as an inseparable whole. Doing IR differently and relationally therefore implies seeing the Other and alternative forms of knowing and being not in terms of "better" or "worse," but as critical elements of that whole. In other words, shifting the ontological commitments that we take for granted gets us beyond the *re-production of patterns* to forging *new pathways* for doing IR and engaging difference and sameness differently.

This radical re-focus, in which categories are not understood to be predetermined and given but rather, dynamic and resulting from ever-changing relations, proffers certain benefits. Most simply, a relational approach and its concomitant both-and logic can foster more inclusive encounters across difference and similarity. Second, by broadening our spectrum of possible forms of knowing, the both-and logic invites us to learn from these other forms through empathy instead of through the fear of existential threats (cf. Arian this forum). Getting out of the either–or hierarchical thinking and into a both-and mindset also allows us to recognize this diversity as key for knowing who we are (Querejazu this forum). As expressed in various cosmological concepts arising from different parts of the world, including *dharma, ayni, ubuntu, advaita,* and *dao* (cf. Querejazu, Reddekop, Shani, and Behera this forum; Ling 2014; Ncgoya 2015; Shahi 2018), the dichotomy of self-other or we-they can be transcended through relationality, allowing for more nuanced understandings of the complex phenomena taking place across the globe and helping us overcome ontological, epistemological, and methodological parochialism within IR.

Admittedly many other critical scholars before us have called on the discipline to overcome the pervasiveness of the either-or logics. Among them, Weber's (1999, 2014) pathbreaking work in queer IR theory deserves special attention. We find key similarities and differences between Weber's and our projects. Both projects identify binary, either-or thinking as conceptually and pragmatically limiting. Furthermore, by pointing to alternative, more spacious logics, the two projects embrace a new range of conceptualizations, practices, and worldings through conscientious work at the level of existential commitments. Since a both-and logic is not exclusionary, the distinctions are seen as complementing one another. First, the sources of relational thought differ. Weber arrives at a both-and logic through queer theory, itself embedded in the tradition of post-structuralism. The contributions in this forum highlight the pluriversal character of both-and dynamics by drawing on distinct registers emerging out of longstanding non-Western cosmological traditions. The sources engaged with by our contributors illustrate how the shifts promoted by

Weber have already operated in temporo-spatially specific ways among diverse peoples of the world that have historically embraced interconnection as an existential starting point. At the heart of this forum is thus a shared commitment to introducing relational approaches to IR that stem from different geocultural traditions as a way to expand the range of imaginable conceptual possibilities and logics and to build a more sophisticated set of tools for engaging complexity more effectively.

Another benefit of robustly relational approaches is that they allow us to move beyond anthropocentric understandings of how the world works. Through this lens we can see how other beings and collectives also actively participate in worlding (see Reddekop and Behera this forum). While most of the critique of anthropocentrism in IR has arisen in the post-human and new materialist literatures, both ultimately rely on an objective reality existing outside through the principles of critical and speculative realism. In other words, their relational claims are still subsumed to substantialist existential commitments (as demonstrated in their insistence to still treat objects *qua* objects, even if these objects' agency is now being recognized) (cf. Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Hodder 2012; Morton 2013; Cohen 2015).

In contrast, indigenous-based approaches have shown that it is possible to be deeply relational and non-anthropocentric at the same time, and have proffered several non-anthropocentric re-conceptualizations of central IR concepts, such as governance (Kuokkanen 2019; Grey and Kuokkanen 2019), nation (Yampara Huarachi 2001; Blaser 2010), treaty (Simpson 2012), sovereignty (Corntassel and Woons 2017), and land (Laduke 1999; de la Cadena 2015). With this ontological revamping, these supposedly standardized categories at the core of the discipline of IR start to look and be understood very differently across distinctly constituted political communities. We share a deep respect and appreciation for these efforts to expound on relational ways of thinking and being in indigenous, aboriginal, and other ancestral contexts. At the same time, we recognize the ontological and cosmological diversity that characterizes the world. Acknowledging and working with such worldly diversity of perspectives offers the possibility to trace the co-creative processes that emerge through the frictions of contrast and to examine reflexively our participation in these co-becomings (see especially Querejazu this forum).

The post-Western IR literature offers additional inputs that are fundamental to the spirit of this forum.[3] Much gratitude is owed to Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) for injecting doubt into how we engage difference and sameness in IR and for opening space for reformulations such as those included here. In their subsequent efforts to think world politics differently, Tickner and Blaney (2012, 2013) ask participating scholars to review how certain disciplinary concepts of IR have been dealt with in distinct parts of the world and what alternative registers for "claiming" the international from the disciplining function of IR may exist. Our forum echoes such exercises in some ways, as the authors explore how "difference" has been engaged "in 'y' part of the world" but with the important distinction that here the pieces are explicitly hinged through a common existential commitment to relationality. This dimension allows them to converse more directly and it provides a number of crucial insights outlined in the conclusion. Additionally, the geocultural-cosmological traditions play an important role in shaping the particular expressions of relational logic due to the very specific and unique accumulations of interactions anchored in each of these respective time-places. For this reason, we do not assume that these logics work in the same way from one context to another.

Because the forum looks to forms of knowing and being from various parts of the world that share relational existential commitments, we also see ourselves as

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[3]Although sources of inspiration are varied and widespread, representative texts from these debates include Chan (1994), Tickner (2003), Agathangelou and Ling (2004), Acharya and Buzan (2007), Qin (2007), Bilgin (2008), Tickner and Wæver (2009), Mgonja and Makombe (2009), Acharya and Buzan (2010), Nayak and Selbin (2010), Acharya (2011), Hutchings (2011), Shilliam (2012), Tickner and Blaney (2012), Shimizu et al. (2013), Ling (2014), Shih and Huang (2018), and Rutazibwa and Shilliam (2018).

responding to Nayak and Selbin's (2010, 166) call "to fundamentally reimagine the ontological presuppositions which have guided and disciplined IR" by decentering it both geoculturally and ontologically. In this way too, we hope to support Shilliam's (2015, 24) provocation that we "cultivate knowledge" through deep relationality. This collection of essays also complements other like-minded relational exercises, such as Ling's (2014, 138–152) comparative relational work with Carolina Pinheiro between Confucianism and Andean philosophy. Here we build on their efforts by pulling into the conversation other cosmological traditions such as Sanatan dharma, Sikhi, Kyoto School Buddhism, and Islam.

It is important that an exercise such as the one that we propose takes heed of a warning issued by Hutchings (2011, 646) to those wanting to question the ethnocentrism and parochialism in IR. She cautions against repeating the patterns of feminist efforts to challenge "sexism and patriarchy in IR," which ran into the following scenario:

> From the perspective of mainstream IR, the power of the traditional binary understanding of sex and gender, regardless of feminist claims to pluralism, has meant that the game of dialogue remains the sameness-difference game. *Either* feminist IR is a *different* way of doing things—in which case it is not really IR at all—*or* feminist IR is the *same* way of doing things, in which case it adds an interesting variable into the explanation of events, but shifts nothing in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Even though we are responding to the discipline's shortsightedness in terms of how it conceptualizes difference and the Other, by intentionally shifting towards existential assumptions rooted in a relational both-and logic, we are not seeking to exclude previous traditions but to introduce alternative possibilities. In this sense, we are not looking for our efforts to revolutionize the core of IR, although the either-or scenario that Hutchings describes can easily depict how conventional scholarship may choose to understand what we are proposing.[4] Nevertheless, we will continue to insist that we are *both* doing IR *and* doing it differently through an ontological decentering.

Along with the diversity of perspectives examined in the forum, a geocultural decentering also transpires through the authors' diverse backgrounds. For example, of the five cis-gender women contributing to this piece, one senior scholar, Navnita Chadha Behera, was born and educated in India through her master's degree and completed her PhD in IR in the UK. Since the mid-1990s, she has been back teaching in India. The second senior scholar, Arlene B. Tickner, was born and educated in the United States, but her entire academic career has transpired in Latin America. Tickner and Behera have enjoyed over 15 years of sustained collaboration and mutual support even though they have yet to co-author a single text together. Amaya Querejazu in turn was born and educated in Bolivia through her undergraduate education and then moved to Colombia to complete her MA and PhD in Political Science where she remained to teach thereafter. Of Iranian descent but raised and educated in the Netherlands, Anahita Arian is currently teaching in Germany after recently completing her PhD. Finally, Tamara Trownsell was born and educated in

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[4] Hutchings' description is important because it reveals the ontological consistency of mainstream IR. Both the strategy of exclusion in the "sameness-difference" game and the way in which sex and gender are understood are based on the same either-or logic which is a fruit of assuming separation. Importantly, an either-or logic is only possible when the complementary opposite phenomena are understood in "categorical" and "embodied" ways. Within the postcolonial feminist literature, Trinh Minh-ha has called this game the "apartheid type of difference" (Minh-ha cited in Barad 2014, 169–170). To disrupt the binary and to figure "difference differently," Minh-ha proposes that "a nonbinary conception of difference is 'not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness'"; "differences as well as similarities" are conceived as lying "*within* the concept of difference." By re-focusing on the ontological, we seek to avoid "reiterat[ing] the same problematic logics" (Barad 2014, 170).

the United States, but remained to live and teach in Ecuador after conducting her PhD field research due to a fluid integration into the culture.

Of the three cis-gender men, two are senior scholars. The first, Giorgio Shani, is a global citizen of South Asian and European descent, raised in the United States, educated in London, and currently teaching in Japan. Kosuke Shimizu was born and raised in Japan with both strong feminist tendencies and Buddhist principles. After completing his PhD in IR in New Zealand, he has been researching and teaching in Japan ever since. Finally, while born, educated, and currently teaching Indigenous Studies in an Indigenous-led and -centered college department in Canada, Jarrad Reddekop completed an interdisciplinary PhD in Theory and Criticism based on field research among Amazonian Quichua populations. One important observation about these distinct life paths is that almost all challenge the easy (categorical) supposition of correspondence between identity, geographical location, upbringing, education, and research interests.

No less significant, a third form of decentering is central to this forum in that the senior scholars involved in this collective have been expressly interested in supporting the voices and arguments of the less experienced ones and in placing them in more prominent spaces within the forum. The creation of a small collective whose members have come to know each other through sustained interaction, and whose shared commitment to relational ways of thinking has nurtured a supportive, intimate, and non-threatening environment for developing ideas and for bringing them to fruition, has proven crucial to overcoming the power hierarchies that normally operate within academic practice (see Tickner 2013, 229).

The six brief contributions that follow offer rich ground for handling difference differently, both in our thinking and research, and in our teaching. Together, they show how a shared ontological commitment to the principles of relationality can generate new kinds of conversations and crucial insights, notwithstanding the varied traditions in which they are anchored. In fact, seeing how similar concepts and logics play out distinctly across the cosmological traditions of Sanatan dharma, Sikhi, Kyoto School Buddhism, Islam, and Andean *cosmopraxis* encourages more comparative work. Additionally these interventions show how we might complement well-established separation-based tools and build a more diverse toolbox more capable of engaging the complexity of today's world.

In the opening essay, Amaya Querejazu develops a basic explanation of relationality through Andean philosophy. She then points to how we might ontologically re-orient ourselves to engage with difference differently by contrasting the logics stemming from complementary-opposite existential assumptions. Next, based on an Amazonian Quichua articulation of Andean philosophy, Jarrad Reddekop reviews how this deeply relational approach reconfigures the notions of humans, non-humans, nations, territory, and difference. Building nicely on Querejazu's essay, he shows how the ontological and conceptual gap, that divides the term "human" and its non-anthropocentric Quichua corollary "*runa*," generates a vast set of implications for how we understand unfolding relations with humans, other species, and land. Furthermore, in discussing *runa* as "someone like us, a relative with whom we can empathize," Reddekop also prepares the ground for Arian's more explicit discussion of empathy in the fifth essay.

Giorgio Shani's contribution most explicitly examines the influence of cosmological commitments on ways of life, political organization, and theorizing. Albeit deriving from a completely distinct cosmological tradition, his piece on *Sikhi* elucidates many of the fruits of relational logics already discussed in Querejazu's and Reddekop's essays, such as how a deeply relational "both-and" logic fosters a higher tolerance for multiplicity and the ability to simultaneously embrace distinct cosmological traditions (cf. Behera this forum). Next, Kosuke Shimizu presents us with a dilemma: What happens in the encounter between separation-based logics and relational ones? Musing on the interactions between the relational

philosophers of the Kyoto School and political leaders in Japan during the inter-war period, his is the story of how the beautiful language of relationality was tacti-cally deployed to justify Japanese imperialism. He warns against the risks that can accompany relational approaches by critiquing how this relational philosophy was used politically to attain the very ends of subjugating and incorporating the differ-ent other. Critical for identifying important questions that need to be examined for a relational theoretical agenda, the Kyoto School's case is analyzed at length in the conclusion.

If Shimizu's piece contemplates our responsibility as relational scholars in engag-ing the world of politics and the potential ramifications of our theorizing on how different others are engaged, the last two essays call our attention to the potential of our role as teachers in fostering an appreciation for difference in the classroom. In her essay, Anahita Arian draws on "The Children of Adam" by the Persian poet Sa'di to discuss how one might cultivate an "ethics of understanding" through the human faculty of empathy to engage more constructively distinct and oftentimes contradictory positions in texts and among students. Where Arian aims to foster an appreciation for the diversity of thought and being in the world through empathy in her classroom, Navnita Behera conscientiously injects multiplicity into hers as a way to bridge book knowledge with lived local knowledge. She intentionally holds space to contemplate the simultaneous existence of both less-familiar IR concepts and the distinct empirical realities of India, of both the learned "official" history and other historical registers. Her students walk away with an appreciation both for the richness of their own contexts infused with multiple Indian cosmological tradi-tions and for the potential contributions of predominant renditions of history and central disciplinary concepts, although in a more situated, less universalizing way. By making these distinctions more conspicuous, students glean a more complex toolset with which to actively "encounter" (in Querejazu's sense) differing accounts of world politics, IR as a discipline, and "reality" in general. Moreover, by fostering the self-confidence to diverge conceptually and theoretically from the cannons, she unleashes potential for enriching scholarly diversity and theoretical development.

Overall, each of the six contributions concretely illustrates how changing our fundamental assumptions about existence can disrupt many of the ontological com-monsense assumptions that we use for thinking about and engaging with difference (and similarity). Each in its own way nudges us to stretch our minds, bodies, and sensory channels when teaching, researching, living, and engaging politically. The forum's conclusion engages in more detail with these key insights.

Why Relational Encounters?

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Encounters are part of life. One might say that encounters *are* life. After all, we are what we are as a result of countless encounters, and what we will become depends on our engagement with others. Encounters, then, are a potentially unique site from which to do IR differently. The more we come face to face with difference, the deeper and more complex our transformation will be, given that difference is what makes us confront who we are and our ways of experiencing life. Encounters shape life in anything but an ordered and tidy way, yet we often opt to simplify such messi-ness through knowledge, theories, and methodologies that attempt to capture real-ity in manageable and discrete categories and abstractions that can be systematized into binaries composed of opposite poles (good/bad, I/other, nature/culture). By focusing on the poles, we tend to look more at the results of the encounter, that is, what we *are* after the encounter has taken place. However, from the perspective of

relationality, the goal is to concentrate on the encounters themselves, not what causes them or what they produce, and to see them as relating processes of becoming, that is, to bodily become the place where different identities coexist as pluriversal beings (cf. Shani, Reddekop, and Behera this forum). To do so, we need to embrace relationality as a useful and potentially better-equipped ontological framework, not with the purpose of opposing it to other ontologies, but to enhance the possibilities that appear by taking relations as standpoint.

That reality can be systematized into existing binaries reflects ontological assumptions. The most important one is that beings are independent entities that can exist on their own, and are therefore essences that coexist with each other, but are basically separate from one another. These atomistic ontologies pose separation as an ordering principle, a premise that has been increasingly problematized and criticized, particularly because binary thinking conditions us to think of difference in a certain way (Latour 2007, 23; Descola 2011, 94; Blaser 2013, 24). This logic relies on two basic principles: identity and non-contradiction (A = A therefore is not B), through which the encounter of two different entities (A + B) produces a different result separable from its components (C). The outcome of such logics is that for one pole to be true, the other must be untrue and other results cannot be possible. Under this logic, encountering difference or contradictions threatens the integrity that we assume a category or entity to have. This "formula" is a valid form of depicting reality but not the only one. The problem is not in the formula itself but in how the formula is carried out in practice, how it is "worlded" (Ling 2014, 2; Haraway 2016, 35). The problem is that difference is used—consciously or unconsciously—to create power relations to deepen and produce difference as a problem, even in cases where it is not.

Inayatullah and Blaney (2004, 98) argued that IR does not escape from this Western/modern logic of possibility, because it reproduces the binary inside/outside producing subjectivities (Walker 2006, 58) that defines difference as a problem. As a result of a double movement, difference becomes *either* inferiority *or* the possibility of a common humanity. According to the authors, this offers a very limited option to be part of international politics, because both logics are conceived and defined by the same totalizing rationality: a world of independent entities (states, individuals) *or* a cosmopolitical order, each one appearing as opposite to the other.

This *either-or* logic poses difference as the specific result of the encounter A + B = C in particular and restraining ways. Through the ontology of separation, C is the result of "melting" difference and becomes real only as a different separate entity, independent of A and B. Racial and social discrimination are examples of this: the result of the encounter of different white/western/superior with a non-white/nonwestern/inferior creates a third and separate outcome: hybrid, syncretic, half-blood (A + B = C). Characterizing the outcome of encounters with terms like syncretism, acculturation, inculturation, assimilation, and hybridity is problematic because they refer to a process of inclusion, absorption, and submission of difference into a logic defined by binary atomist ontology that fixes identities and presumed roles accordingly. All of them are synthesis, fusions that represent a certain different identity according to which our expectations are conditioned of what that result should be. It has also been argued that encounters are a "zero-sum game." Winners are the ones who after the encounter end up having a dominant position over the other, or have the power to define the outcome/nature of the encounter. Shani (this forum) illustrates this in the Western transformation of *sikhi* into Sikhism. This of course discourages encountering difference, because it leads us to presume that the losing party has no agency in how the encounter takes place or what it produces. In both cases, difference becomes a problem.

Mediated by power relations, this ontological formula becomes political and contingent and needs to be provincialized so that other alternative ontological formulas can be taken into account as part of reality as politics. Because "it matters what

worlds world worlds" (Haraway 2016, 33), we should question what happens if we start with relationality to address the problem of difference in the moments of encounters. Doing so means starting from the premise that relations are the fundamental condition of existence because they transform and define existence as a constant becoming. Everything is related and nothing exists in isolation.

In relationality, beings are composed of complementary opposites. Nothing exists without the opposite which is by definition, different. Therefore, for life to take place, for beings to fully exist, difference is needed. Day is not without night, dark is not without light, and so on. Relationality brings the opportunity to consider encounters as a centerpiece from which to give sense to existence *as* complexity and contradiction, due to their creative and transformative capacity (see Reddekop this forum). In a constant process of becoming, encounters renovate identities by providing insights and knowledge for understanding change and dynamism that constitute realities. There are no great divides, unless they are the result of a rupture or a major disruption of the relation until some balance is reached.

This seems like a simple idea, but it fundamentally challenges key claims about the sovereign self, the sovereign state, and many core concepts of the study of international politics, or the false problems of Western/global IR (Shani, Behera in this forum). Approaching encounters relationally gives us meaningful tools not only to value and assess the outcomes with alternative notions but also to appreciate the encounter itself as the crucial moment or process of making sense of us and of the other in a more comprehensive way. It prepares us to see the in-between possibilities of coexistence among different forms of being. Ultimately encounters of difference trigger life. It is in that moment where actors not only are redefined but also redefine.

The lack of total separation between opposites has tremendous implications. Here, I just want to mention one: the "problem" of difference or how we can engage difference. Each world contains methods for collaborating with difference, and yet, as scholars of IR we are not well equipped to know them. The Andean world is a relational world, not only the one that I know the most, but also the one that made me question who I am. It has at least two notions that provide important insights of what these encounters can mean.

Tinku is the encounter of opposites, yet it should not be understood as just that. *Tinkus* have a cosmic function or goal: to facilitate reaching a cosmic equilibrium of forces. In the encounter itself, relations trigger the transformation of the forces/entities/beings into becoming something else. This cannot be subsumed to the notion of synthesis, because it is already being affected by other relations that impede ever being able to fix identities. The cosmic balance is of most importance, and as relationality states, can only be achieved through the reciprocity between complementary opposites. With this in mind, encounters of difference and with difference are necessary because they are the engine of life.

The second notion, *taypi,* refers to the -in between- dimension, process, space of mediation, and connection where difference can encounter and negotiate, where the transformation and the becoming happens. The significant meaning that these rich notions give to handling difference is just a glimpse of what the Andean world and all the worlds in the planet that experience life relationally have to offer.

Relationality produces a constant dynamic of encounter, appropriation (creative impulse of agency) and transformation (Arnold 2018, 26); it is an ongoing process that is never complete (Bouysse-Cassagne 2004, 60). This approach to difference moves us beyond the zero-sum game or syncretic results, opening space to comprehend other logics. For example, we can understand the active role played by what appear to be passive actors in an encounter: They take something from the other, not with the purpose of assimilation or mimicry, but in an impulse of self-redefinition and appropriation. They make out of something different something

that is their own in the sense of personalization. For example, indigenous people who migrate to cities and become "westernized," are both-and (not either-or) indigenous and western. They apprehend both worlds and transform themselves, becoming existentially versatile or ontologically "bilingual." Depending on the context in which they find themselves, they will highlight their indigeneity or their western features without being both simultaneously. This provides a very different way of understanding agency.

Postcolonial approaches have criticized the symbolic violence behind the movement of fixing identities. As an alternative, relationality illustrates how identities do not have to be a somewhat forced labeling (Shani and Behera this forum). Andean *tinkus* and *taypis* show how the encounter makes it possible for people who engage with difference to be transformed and yet at the same time be the same, depending on the relations.

We do not have to necessarily innovate new methodologies but learn from existing ones. After all, millions of people in the world live according to relational frameworks and have engaged with relational encounters of difference for centuries. Relationality makes alternative results of the encounter possible. Since nothing exists on its own and every existence is conditioned by a series of relations, fractal identities partially connected (Strathern 2004, 39) become possible. This fractality implies that identities are in constant transformation, therefore reality is a constant becoming. Furthermore, in terms of relating difference and opposites, it admits alternatives to the either-or scenario. The alternative of both-and in simultaneity becomes possible (cf. Shani and Behera this forum). Instead of fixing identities in categories such as hybrid or half-blood, identities can be defined in terms of both western/nonwestern depending on context, time, space, and relation. In other words, it makes it possible for beings to become and play different roles that cannot be fixed but are transformed.

Of course this does not mean that encounters with difference are free from tensions and conflicts. Yet relationality allows us to conceive of such tensions as dynamic and creative instead of just falling into normative interpretations and expectations. Every encounter implies making sense of what goes on, and that process is defined by ontological beliefs. However, beliefs demand efforts of opening up and loosening, hence transformation (Verran 2002, 730). Relational ontologies enable us to realize that encounters matter not only for producing other possible outcomes but because they are the creative source of reality that we might have overlooked in IR. Relational encounters are cosmopraxis (practice of being in and with the cosmos in relation with other times and other beings) or worldings. The point can be very simple: we not only need difference to *be*, but we *are* because we are different, and we can be different in plural, and also pluriversal ways (cf. Shani, Reddekop, Behera this forum), that without erasing difference, show that the "problem" of difference is no more.

Why *Runa*?

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The Amazonian Quichua term *runa* is usually translated as "human." The meaning of each of these terms, however, differs significantly. In the gap of translatability between *human* and *runa* can be discerned a difference in fundamental ontological assumptions made about existence and about beings. Much as the figure of the human configures us as selves, positions us within the cosmos, and imagines interactive and normative horizons along certain lines, so does the term *runa* for

traditional Quichua people—though it does so differently. Emerging from a profoundly relational ontology, *runa* as a concept offers a window into seeing how certain questions or problems that are consequential and familiar to the world-framing enacted in IR, might be negotiated differently. These include the distinction and interrelation between "human" and "nonhuman" and their respective natures as entities; the constitution of selves and communities; the nature of boundaries between (groups of) entities; the nature of encountered difference; and possibilities for relating to that difference (cf. Querejazu this forum). Critical literatures of various genres (de/coloniality, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and on the anthropocene) have shown how particular conventions in posing and resolving such questions inform the dominant worldview, structures, and limits constituting IR. More rarely, however, are the immanent logics of alternative ontologies engaged directly—though we may acknowledge their effacement in a world of sovereign states and in IR as the study of states' interactions (King 2017). My goal here is to explore briefly this comparative terrain, building on scholarly literatures and fieldwork.

The figuration of the human that persistently underlies IR's dominant imaginaries hails from the philosophical, legal, and moral heritage of Western thought (Gilson 1991, 13; Douzinas 2000, 184; Latour 2002, 5–16). The human here is usually conceived as a class of atomistic entities (assumed to be finite, relatively stable, fixed, bounded) with certain defining properties/faculties (reason, language, free will, etc.) that set the human morally and existentially apart into an exceptional position relative to others (plants, animals, minerals). This class of beings exists within a singular, universal field of knowability, insofar as the act of knowing is conceived as approaching a universal, God-like vantage-point through reason, to which things appear in their truth. Amazonian Quichua thinking by contrast is "perspectivist" (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 471). The fundamental cosmological terrain here is a relational field of selves with no Archimedean point. Selves are at once localized and limited in their experience but also continually composed, grown, and mutually differentiated through relationships (cf. the process of *tinku* in the *taypi* described above by Querejazu, this forum).

The notion of *runa* reflects this perspectivism: it means most properly someone like "us" (from a Quichua point of view), a relative, someone with whom it is possible to empathize. The term accordingly serves as an ethnonym but can also be expanded outwards in various ways (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 476; Swanson 2009, 62). To recognize someone as a *runa* in the restrictive sense implies processes of relating with them *as* a relative—spending time together, sharing food and mutual feelings of conviviality and caring. An important contrasting term is *auca*—people outside the sphere of those bonds of caring. *Aucas* are actual or potential enemies, "outsiders" for and from whom no empathy exists or seems possible (Swanson 2009, 62). The term has referred for example to neighboring Amazonian groups like the Achuar or Waorani, with whom they share histories of hostilities.

The scope of *runa* thus falls short of enclosing all "human" beings, but also extends beyond the "human" to include "nonhuman" beings depending on the context. Other species are described in origin stories as having once lived as *runa* but subsequently having transformed into the different bodily forms they take today. This process is recounted as transpiring through histories of heartbreak and anger, and breakdowns in relationships (Swanson 2009, 57; Swanson and Reddekop 2017, 685). These tensions are resolved through the creation of distance, as the various *runa* withdraw into the relative privacy and inscrutability of their present forms. The difference present in the bodily strangeness of other species is interpreted, in other words, so as to foreground the problem of *what this means for and in terms of the inter-resonance of relationships that can be had across it.* Species barriers reflect an extreme degree of alienation—entailing communicative opacity, emotional distance, and other blockages that contrast with the kind of mutual empathy felt

between close relations. Nonetheless, underneath and in their own way of seeing, other species are *runa*, are "like us." This grounds the notion that, if only one could empathize enough, this commonality would become apparent—and through this process it remains possible to open communicative and empathetic windows across these barriers.

That nonhuman beings are *runa* also tells us something about the kind of selves *runa* are: relationally constituted and capable of transformation. In their withdrawal, plants and animals transform into different bodies that, decoupled from old relations, develop new ways of intersecting with the environment: new ways of moving and eating and speaking, new modes of being-in-relation with others that compose how they now are. Each species community encloses within itself a private language, experiences of attraction, and distinctive styles of being that occupy a niche within the distribution of styles composing a local territory. Lessening these barriers of opacity requires spending time in the forest, interacting with other species, becoming familiar with the land in an embodied way by eating its foods and taking its medicines. Doing so entails a limited transformation of our own selves and the bodily modes of being we inhabit (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 468; Swanson and Reddekop 2017, 690). Individuals and collectivities adapt to become like the beings they spend time with, attentively study and try to understand. These relations grow the self and one's imaginative, interactive, and empathetic capacities (Ingold 2000, 93–106; Swanson and Reddekop 2017, 694–695). It is possible in this way to become a relative (*aylluyashka*) of the forest. Such processes also mediate and shape relations among "human" relatives.

Following the notion of *runa*, it is therefore possible to see how relational thought and practice can give rise to an understanding and constitution of community as profoundly interwoven with local ecologies of beings in co-adaptive ways. Modes of dialogic attunement to the doings of nonhuman *runa* are foregrounded, articulable, and part of interpretations of everyday events and experiences of selfhood. In traditional Amazonian thinking, relationships with other species are thus not separate from the normal concerns, extension, or rhythm of social life (Descola 1996, 93). The land is not a passive stage for human events, a sum of mute resources or lower life forms. Differences and boundaries between species are important in that they allow for privacy and distances necessary for the world to function, but they are not absolute and may be lessened in ways that are enriching (Swanson and Reddekop 2017, 691, 696). Rather than rigid lines and categories, we see a shifting field of potentially transformative intersections, becomings, and positionings. A relative play of proximity and distance is negotiated in degrees, and it is not decided abstractly or instantaneously but navigated through the timing and rhythm of emergent relationships, around which a sophisticated normative vocabulary exists.

It is notable that the differences between *runa* and non-*runa* peoples, who speak other languages and are from elsewhere (including those specifically thought of as *aucas*), are often analogized to differences between species. This entails distinctive interpretations of what such differences amount to. Thus while Quichua people have historical and conceptual frameworks for encountering and relating with (something like) Others, the concepts, structures, horizons, and dangers involved are distinct from familiar Western ones pertaining to analogous problems. This is quite far from modern Western tropes concerning "the in/human" or the danger of viewing human groups as "animal-like"—as in settler colonial logics justifying the dispossession of indigenous peoples (Kanji 2017, 65), but also racist ideologies more broadly. In the familiar Western case, groups may be likened to animals *qua* a lower category within a stable, hierarchical sorting of atomistic beings. A group may be viewed as too primitive or animalistic to warrant the moral or political considerations due to those living in a properly "human" way. Assimilation into the collective habitus of "humanity" (if this is deemed possible) thus becomes a condition of recognition. Because of the human exceptionalism subtending this in/human

classification, *it validates either the application of moral norms or permits their suspension.* At the same time, this anthropocentric codification of human–animal relations is affirmed and underwrites the broader order of things.

Otherness in Quichua thinking is, I think, closer to how Behera (this forum) describes it within the Hindu tradition: as a range of possible empirical forms of difference (including other species) with whom relationships (at varying degrees of proximity) are possible. If *dharma* refers to a moral law governing all relations with otherness (Behera this forum), in Quichua thinking there are norms around cultivating and having mature and orderly relationships that apply much more broadly within a varied, inter-resonant cosmological field than if they were limited to one category of (atomistic, human) beings. It is notable that the difference encountered in other species is thought as a rule to be both good and fascinating in its strangeness, often admirable and a potential source of learning, and part of the interdependent vibrancy that makes life possible (cf. Querejazu this forum).

Aucas lie at an extreme end of this spectrum in relationships with otherness, but not outside of it. Here repulsion, anger, and estrangement prevail. If all societies grapple with relations of violence and war, *auca* has been a term that codifies such experiences for Quichua people, signifying an emotional and empathetic distance that makes killing thinkable. But to call someone an *auca* is not to render them as "sub-human." This is so even while, as Taussig (1987, 230–236) has described, the figure of *auca* today often appropriates imageries and differentiations emergent from colonial histories, including of "wilder," unbaptized Indigeneity.

Like other examples of Quichua classification, *auca* concerns the cohering of selves into mutually distanced forms of existence. *Aucas* are identified with the *sacha* or forest, and analogized to animals, but animals are not sub-human beings. Relational perspectivism does not produce the verticality or stability of the Great Chain of Being. The association of *aucas* with animals or the forest suggests rather mutual communicative opacity, possible dangerousness, and a legacy of mutual emotional coldness or alienation akin to that felt between species. It may also suggest a perception of *auca* selves as constituted through different sets of relations that make them more like the deep forest with which they are associated.

This analogy thus simultaneously indicates empathetic barriers, articulates difference relationally, and explains the possibility of violence. But it also arguably suggests the transferability of techniques and norms for relating maturely to otherness across different forms, not their suspension. In general, such techniques include protocols and practices for softening the situation, and developing empathic bonds (cf. Belaunde 2000, 209–211). Bettering relations though also does not entail the same logics of assimilation or domestication of difference predominantly corresponding to inclusion into "humanity." The pattern is of opening windows for relating, in ways that are appropriate and true to the difference and positionalities of selves in a given meeting or space of inter-resonance (cf. Querejazu this forum). While *auca*, like "inhuman," is therefore a term that mediates relations of violence, one cannot simply assume the direct transferability of dynamics, whether of logics of inclusion/exclusion, forms of violence, or the nature of boundaries as such, from one context to the other.

In Quichua thinking about relating maturely to otherness, an important axis concerns a tension between growing the self in a way that remains rooted and responsible to one's (self-constituting) relations, and the danger of being pulled altogether into another way of being, or rootlessness. While Quichua selfhood is developed through practices of becoming like others, this occurs through relationships that entail forms of reciprocity and groundedness that enmesh (human and nonhuman) selves with each other. This grounded normativity (Coulthard 2014, 13), bound up with the relationality of notions like *runa* or *ayllu*, contrasts strikingly with the normative uprootedness of the happy cosmopolitan subject of globalized capitalism, or with the nature/culture separation and anthropocentrism underlying statist

framings of political life. Descriptions of indigenous IR and diplomacy elsewhere in the United States (King 2017; Corntassel and Woons 2017, 131, 133) have consonantly emphasized that inter-national relations meaningfully occur across species barriers, and that indigenous diplomacies with other human peoples simultaneously reflect such ties and consequent responsibilities to the land. Accordingly one arrives at very different configurations of communities, actors, relations, and normative horizons pertinent to political life, which would constitute distinct forms of "doing IR differently." Following the immanent logic of *runa* beyond its mere use as an ethnonym or an equivalent for "humans" allows a sense of the kind of relational ontology and entailed ways of being that inform other but broadly comparable indigenous lines of thinking.

Lingering with the concept of *runa* illustrates the scope of differences often at play in contemporary political moments—for example, in indigenous-state conflicts over land use, and the continual supplanting of indigenous relationalities with settler colonial existential configurations. However, it also provides a starting point for alternate ways of thinking about and responding *to* those differences, and exploring provocations opened by thinking across worlds. A certain kind of critical defamiliarization concerning dominant ontologies becomes possible. Experimental trajectories open up for learning/rethinking how it is possible to otherwise conceptualize/practice existence and negotiate questions central to political life. Kurki (2019, 65–68) has remarked that "relationality" can be interpreted in different ways, and precisely *how* it is conceptualized matters for the kind of critical possibilities and alternative viewpoints it can be expected to open up. To my mind, the relationality expressed in Quichua thinking is distinct in the degree to which it shapes not only the constituted-ness of entities, but the *nature* of those constituted entities and the interactive horizons they negotiate. If much theoretical energy has been deployed in recent years on how to move and think otherwise than through the figure of the human and the anthropocentrism endemic to dominant modernity (Kaltofen 2018, 33), the notion of *runa* indicates some possibilities that provocatively cut across and exceed that familiar terrain.

Why Sikhi?

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In this contribution a brief attempt is made to engage with a cosmological tradition, *Sikhi*, and to assess its implications for IR. *Sikhi* is a monotheistic (or, strictly speaking, panentheistic) cosmological tradition that originated in the Punjab area of North India, open to all those who are prepared to accept its doctrines and practices. Central to *Sikhi* is the concept of *Vahiguru*, the omnipotent and omnipresent transcendent creator and sovereign of the universe who lies beyond human understanding, time, and space, and does not take human form. The *Vahiguru*'s intentions were revealed to Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who saw the divine to reside in all. The essence of Guru Nanak's message is to be found in the opening hymn of the *Guru Granth Sahib*:

> There is one supreme eternal reality; the truth; immanent in all things; creator of all things; immanent in creation. Without fear and without hatred; not subject to time; beyond birth and death; self-revealing.

Since we are all part of the One (Ik), Nanak believed that humanity cannot be reduced to any name, history, or people. This is encapsulated in the symbol *Ik*

Ōankār, which literally means "One, whose expression emerges as Word." Consequently, there could be no "no Muslim, no Hindu." This is reflected in the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which includes hymns from Hindu and Muslim sacred texts and prophets. Indeed, Guru Nanak is sometimes described as a religious reformer within the Sant tradition familiar in north India at the time which drew on both Hindu and Muslim traditions (McLeod 1969). Most Sikhs, followers of the Guru and his ten successors, believe that Nanak transcended both traditions to form a distinct "religious" tradition. However, boundaries between followers of the Sikh tradition and Hinduism and Islam were often porous right up to the colonial period (Oberoi 1994, 420). The colonial encounter, in an attempt to render *Sikhi* intelligible to a Western social imaginary, transformed *Sikhi* into Sikhism and erected religious boundaries between Sikhs and followers of other religions.

What changed in the colonial period is the way in which identity was conceived (Mandair 2009, 236). The Sikh tradition, or more accurately, Sikh traditions, before the onset of colonial rule were characterized by a multiplicity of different sects which were, in some cases, indistinguishable from Hinduism; the religious boundaries between Sikhs and Hindus were fuzzy and porous. Most Sikhs, Oberoi writes, "moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as resident of this village, at another as part of that caste; and at yet another as belonging to a sacred tradition" (Oberoi 1994, 17). In other words, many Sikhs were both Sikh *and* Hindu. Since *Sikhi* is a dynamic relational concept it could not be contained in the religious categories that British colonial administrators constructed in the nineteenth century. The introduction of the decennial census in particular replaced previously "fuzzy" with "bounded" and enumerated communities competing for political power (Kaviraj 2010, 26). Furthermore, the colonial state facilitated the enumeration of these communities through the inauguration of a process of statistical counting and spatial mapping. Enumeration facilitated the transformation of *local* cosmological traditions into *national* "religious" communities. Consequently, by the beginning of the twentieth century, there was "a growing sentiment among sections of the Sikh community that they belonged to a community distinct from the rest of the population" (Oberoi 1994, 365). In so doing, colonialism led to a "thinning out" of the Sikh cosmological tradition and a separation of the spiritual and temporal dimensions of the Sikh tradition. Sikh*ism* became a religion (see Mandair 2009) and the Sikhs an ethno-religious community or putative nation (see Shani 2008a). Sikhism became the property of a specific people: the Sikhs. What was lost was the message of *Sikhi* and its emphasis on a radical equality inclusive of caste, creed, ethnicity, or gender.

It is argued here that an engagement with *Sikhi*, or the Sikh *cosmological* tradition, may help "provincialize" Western understandings of the relationship between universality and particularity, the religious and political, and nation and state which characterize conventional accounts of IR (Chakrabarty 2007). In so doing, *Sikhi* provides a pathway to "doing IR differently." First, I will attempt to briefly define the terms used. By cosmology, I understand a series of assumptions about the cosmos. A cosmology seeks to explain the origins of the cosmos in which we find ourselves and our place within it. As such, it shares many similarities with ontology and epistemology. However, a cosmology also has a sacred dimension that is usually translated into the Abrahamic concept of "religion." Second, I understand IR—in common with many of the contributors to this forum (see Behera, Querejazu, Reddekop, Shimizu, Trownsell)—to refer to *relations* between different political units that are co-constituted through the process of interaction. Conventional understandings of IR privilege relations between pre-existing, distinct, separate, and stable units: territorialized, sovereign states. States are assumed to be either motivated by self-interest and collectively constitute an anarchic system or society of states bound by a set of common values or norms which regulate state interaction. Although critical, feminist, and postcolonial approaches to IR seek to account for the emergence

of these units by embedding them within structures such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, they employ a secular lens that does not allow them to bring in insights from cosmological traditions. Consequently, IR fails to speak to arguably the majority of mankind who live their lives according to spiritual and relational frameworks.

In India, the "root paradigm of all the major indigenous religious traditions" is that of "the cosmic, moral social order," of *dharma* (cf. Behera this forum). The Sikhs are no exception. It is *dharma*—understood within the Sikh tradition as *dharam*—which constitutes individuals and the world(s) they inhabit. Only recitation of the name of the divine, *satnam*, can lead to liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth characterized by suffering. However, *Sikhi* also has a social dimension: an insistence on social equality, the rejection of all forms of caste distinction and the centrality of the concept of community service (*seva*). The absence of firm boundaries between Sikhs and other communities mean that, especially before the colonial period, Sikhs *could also* be members of other cosmological communities. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the eldest son of every Punjabi Hindu family to become Sikh. Furthermore, the communal kitchen, the *langar*, in Sikh temples (*gurdwaras*) caters not only to the congregation but to all, including members of other faith traditions. This illustrates the "*both-and*" logic of *Sikhi* and other South Asian cosmological traditions which can be contrasted with the "*either-or*" logic of colonial modernity introduced by the British. Applied to IR, an engagement with *Sikhi* would bring into question not only the "zero-sum" game upon which realist theory is based on but also the distinction between universality and particularity characteristic of much of Western epistemology. For Sikhs, as well as many other South Asians, universality is *inclusive* of difference, which means that it can co-exist alongside other, different universalities (see Querejazu and Reddekop this forum).

This has implications for "global IR." Global IR acknowledges that "IR does not reflect the voices, experiences, knowledge claims, and contributions of the vast majority of the societies and states in the world" and transcends "the divide between the West and the Rest" (Acharya 2014, 647). It appears to embrace the "*both-and*" logic of South Asian cosmological traditions. *Sikhi*, it would seem, can be easily accommodated into the "pluralistic universality" favored by "global IR" scholars. A pluralistic universalism "allows us to view the world of IR as a large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations" (Acharya 2014, 649–50). However, *Sikhi* moves us beyond this conceptualization by acknowledging the existence of *plural* universalities within the cosmos. Since we inhabit different worlds, any attempt to integrate different cosmologies into a "Global IR" risks reifying a particular cosmological world view as *the* universe. Instead, *Sikhi* could best be accommodated by a commitment to *pluriversality*: that is, the existence of multiple universalisms which may intersect and influence each other but cannot be encompassed within a "large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations."

As Quijano notes, "virtually in all known cultures, every cosmic vision, every image, all systematic production of knowledge is associated with a perspective of totality." Therefore, attempts to equate a "specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnie" as universality "impose a provincialism as universalism" (Quijano 2010, 31). This is precisely what conventional IR has been so successful at doing: imposing its provincial understanding of IR as universal. An example would be the basic unit of IR: the nation state. A fusion of two interrelated but distinct concepts that emerged with the transition to modernity in Europe, both concepts emerged from a specific cosmology: the Judeo-Christian.

First, the concept of the nation as an ethnic community has its origins in the Jewish idea of a "chosen people" transformed into a "community of blood" by Christianity through the act of transubstantiation. By partaking of Jesus' flesh and blood through the Eucharist, Christians formed a distinct "nation" or "race" which could be differentiated from others (see Anidjar 2014). Second, as Schmitt has argued,

"all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 1985, 1). Indeed, the term "secularism" can only be understood from within the Christian tradition, because the term "secular" was initially used to describe lay monks who chose to leave monasteries and live as part of a community. After the Reformation, it signified the "privatization" of Church property, that is, its transfer to laypersons and entry into market circulation. Finally, in the "discourse of modernity, the 'secular' presents itself as the ground from which theological discourse was generated...and from which it gradually emancipated itself in the mark to freedom" (Asad 2003, 192). Schmitt based his understanding of the "sovereign" on the founding father of the "realist tradition": Thomas Hobbes. Central to Hobbes' thought is a view of the sovereign as a Leviathan, a secularized "Mortal[l] God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defense" (Hobbes 1985, 227). This "Mortal[l] God" alone is capable of providing security in return for liberty.

However, within the Sikh tradition, there developed a different relationship between the religious and political community and, therefore, a different conception of sovereignty. A distinction was made between "spiritual" and "temporal" sovereignties that were posited separately yet embodied in the personage of the Guru. The dual authority of the warrior-Guru was symbolized by the two swords which were first worn by the sixth Guru, Hargobind; *piri*, signifying spiritual authority and *miri*, temporal authority. In Sikhism, the wearing of the two swords was the sole prerogative of the Guru. Thus, the Guru monopolized both spiritual and temporal authority within the community. However, the establishment of the *Khalsa* following the death of the tenth and final Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708) transferred sovereignty from the Guru to his followers. Through the doctrine of *Guru Granth*, Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the spiritual dimensions (*piri*) of the Guru's authority on the holy book—compiled by the Gurus yet including hymns penned by Hindu and Muslim religious figures—the *Adi Granth* (which was hitherto known as the Guru Granth Sahib)—while conferring all temporal authority (*miri*) in the *Khalsa*. Literally meaning "community of the pure," the *Khalsa* came to represent the collective religio-political body of Sikhs. It gave them a cohesive identity as embodied in five external symbols, commonly known as the Five Ks: *kes*, unshorn hair usually but not necessarily worn in a turban; *kanga*, a comb; *Kach*, knee-length breeches; *kara*, a steel bangle worn over the wrist; and finally, a *kirpan*, a sword. The *kirpan* in particular is significant since it contests the state's monopoly of the use of force which is central to the modern understanding of the state. Furthermore, the *Khalsa* was envisaged as a *sovereign* community as encapsulated in the salutation "Raj Karega Khalsa" (the Khalsa shall rule and be sovereign). After Guru Gobind, there would be no further human Gurus with their spiritual authority (*miri*) invested in the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, and their temporal authority invested in the Khalsa (*piri*).

The implication for IR is that an engagement with the Sikh tradition provincializes the nation-state as *one* type of political community among many. The *Khalsa* was established as a sovereign religio-political community but may exist with other identities and forms of political community unlike exclusivist understandings of the nation-state. Although the majority of Sikhs are citizens of India, the sovereignty invested upon them by Gobind Singh is *embodied* in the Five Ks and does not *necessarily* clash with the claims of the nation-state (Shani 2008b, 730).[5] In so doing, we can talk of "multiple and overlapping sovereignties" (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, 31). Sovereignty may not be seen as an exclusive claim to a particular territory as in the European model but multiple and embodied. It is multiple in that it can co-exist

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[5] When it has done so, it is because the state has refused to refused to accept the sovereignty of the *Khalsa* over issues concerning the Sikh community, thus violating the "inner domain" (see Chatterjee 1994) or spiritual dimension of sovereignty.

with other forms of political community and embodied in that it is invested in the collective body of the *Khalsa* and not linked to territory.

In short, an engagement with *Sikhi* allows us not only to "provincialize" key concepts such as universality, sovereignty, and secularism but also to reconceptualize them in such a way as to expand the horizons of IR and make it a more inclusive field of study for many in the Global South. We have seen how *Sikhi* is a *universal* cosmological tradition that cannot be accommodated within the "pluralistic universality" favored by global IR scholars. It developed a *political* dimension that, although distinct from the religious dimension, cannot be separated from it, thus problematizing the dichotomy between the religious and the secular. Finally, it developed an understanding of sovereignty which is both multiple and empodied. All political authority is invested in the collective body of believers who constitute the *Khalsa* which is understood as a s*overeign* community. The *Khalsa*, however, is not confined to a particular territory and can co-exist with other "multiple and overlapping sovereignties" in a *pluriversal* world order.

Why Kyoto School?

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The Kyoto School has been one of the foci of contemporary IR particularly when non-Western discourses started attracting attention. The School has two distinctive but related dimensions. Each has its own way of contributing to IR in terms of how we understand and engage with the study of world affairs. The first dimension is their philosophical inquiry, ontology in particular. It is commonly said that their philosophy was profoundly influenced by Buddhism, and it shows us an alternative way to perceive, understand, and investigate the world with Buddhist traditions. The second, more practical dimension, involves the School's incorporation into the Japanese imperialist regime of the inter-war period, which propounds us a cautionary tale in engaging with non-Western discourses. The following is a brief sketch of the School's two dimensions and the way they contribute to IR.

Based at the Kyoto Imperial University during the inter-war period, the Kyoto School was a philosophical school that consisted of several philosophers who developed original existentialist philosophy. The members of the School include Nishida Kitaro, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, Kosaka Masaaki, Miki Kiyoshi, and Tosaka Jun. Their philosophical inquiries were by no means unified, ranging from conservative to progressive, from purely philosophical to more political. Their common ground, however, was their exclusive focus on the concept of being and persistent concern with relationality. In this sense, they were all existentialists. Their philosophical inquiry is commonly understood as having a profound influence from Mahāyāna Buddhism. Here Mahāyāna Buddhism refers to philosophy rather than the religious dimension, if we presume the separation of these two to be possible.

The Kyoto School's philosophical engagement with ontology was developed with the concept of relationality, *engi* in Buddhist language. The term relationality requires further explanation here. It is not to focus on the relationship between two separate beings as commonly understood in contemporary IR. Rather, the philosophers insisted that the spontaneous relationship generates two separate beings, thus subjectivities in the case of human relations. This spontaneous relationality as the cause of subjectivity is what they called "pure experience." It is assumed in contemporary Confucian relational theories of IR that the given relationship and pre-existing roles in the hierarchy construct the subjects performatively (Qin 2018; Yan 2019; Zhao 2019). This is because, as Butler suggests, "regulatory practices" is the

core of generating "coherent identities" (Butler 1990, 23). On the other hand, the subjects or relationship according to this School's philosophy do not exist before the spontaneous relationship takes place (Nishida 1947, 4; Shimizu 2015). A conflict does not occur between agents in this sense. Rather the conflict *generates* agents. The conflict, therefore an action, takes place first, then the agents appear. In their philosophy, there is no subject a priori.[6] The agent as we know of in the discourse of Western philosophy can be only referred to as "nothing" or "empty."

The empty agent has a substantial significance for the contemporary IR literature. How would we see the nation-state? Would it be possible to regard a nation-state as empty too? Interestingly, the second generation of the Kyoto School philosophers indeed regarded Japan as empty. This emptiness, however, had a positive connotation to them. The emptiness of Japan made its unprecedented political and economic development possible since the radical transformation from a feudal nation to the civilized one marked by the Meiji Restoration. They enthusiastically argued that this emptiness was the reason for the unprecedented absorption of Western science, technology, and civilization. They maintained that the high status of Japan in the contemporary international politics has never been possible without it (Kosaka, Nishitani, Koyama & Suzuki 1943, 388; Sugawara 2018). Their stress on the emptiness of nation-state was not limited to the simple explanation of Japan's rapid development. It had wider and more profound implications for the world they perceived. As the emptiness is supposed to be all-inclusive and destined to absorb everything, a nation-state reifying and manifesting the "emptiness" must also be inclusive, at least logically. They argued that this all-inclusive society, namely Japan, guarantees the moral high ground and brings the harmony among its members.

Here, I should clarify the differences between the first generation and the second by emphasizing their ontological foci. The first generation was more concerned with the concrete context of being than with the entire world. The school's aim in the writings of the first generation was to understand the meanings of being in a particular context. It was to liberate those suffering from tragic and disastrous experiences by providing meaning to being. In this sense, the first generation's philosophy came very close to traditional Mahāyāna Buddhism. On the other hand, the second generation was more eager to engage with world politics and provided an authentic story of the "entire whole" and individuals. They developed the story of the whole world by saying that individuals are "self-definition" of the "entire whole," by adopting the teachings of the *kegon* sect of Buddhism. They also adopted Confucianism into their political engagement. They frequently referred to family as the fundamental basis of social order, and as a result, the relationality they assumed in their inquiry into the world order was supposedly fixed and installed in the given hierarchy of the world. As I will argue later, the adaptation of *kegon* Buddhism and Confucianism in their political writings had substantial meanings in terms of their involvement with Japanese imperialism.

Although this philosophical inquiry provided a transformative moment to the discourse of philosophy, the School has a dark side, that is, they were deeply involved with the imperialism of Japan. Their involvement varied by degree, whereby the first generation was more receptive and their disciples were more active and enthusiastic. Yet the most prominent and highly admired philosophical school's incorporation into the imperialist regime of Japan cast a prolonged shadow over the post-war Japanese intellectuals. How did they end up justifying Japan's aggression towards other Asian nations? If "emptiness" or "nothingness" is the presupposition of their philosophy, which presumably leads us to a more peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive—in the sense of being receptive—order, in what way did such concepts resonate with the justification of blunt imperialist aggression and violence?

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[6]This stands in contrast to the version of relationality and conflict delineated by Querejazu this forum.

The first is their insufficient attention to ethics. As they were exclusively concerned with ontology and being, they were excessively focusing on defining truth. For them, the good was only located in the context of the truth, or it only becomes possible in the form of an extension of the existentialist truth. As the truth was always relational for them, the good only appears to be relational too, that is, as a receptive form to the relationship. In general, this receptive understanding of ethics inevitably leads us to virtue ethics, in which the good is singularly provided by a virtuous figure, not by a moral standard remotely set from concrete contexts. When the School insisted that Japan is the representation of "nothingness," they were implicitly presuming that Japan is a reification of virtue ethics. As a result, they proudly declared that Japan is the only nation representing morality in a capitalist world characterized by the total lack of moral concerns. The question here, of course, is whether a nation-state can be a bearer of virtue ethics. What does it mean for Japan as a nation-state to be virtuous? Who is the virtuous sage in Japan? Is it the Emperor, the Prime Minister, or the military general?

Second, the School's lack of attention to language is also something to blame. While they used the term "Japan" frequently in their political writings, they never properly defined the term. As the term "Japan" and its imperial household had been constantly in use throughout the long history of the nation, the School automatically assumed that Japan and the Emperor system have been consistent. However, history proves otherwise. There have been countless discontinuities in their pedigrees; even their origins were not indigenous. Moreover, Japan was not monolithic or standardized like the Kyoto School philosophers presumed. Rather, their version of "Japanese culture" was more of "Kyoto culture" (Sugawara 2018, 264). If a subject is generated by relationship, the discontinuities must be taken seriously, for in any moment there lies the possibility that the unexpected would take place, and thus the subject would be substantially changed. In the Buddhist theory of consciousness or *yuishikiron* by which the School was profoundly influenced, memories of the past or plans of the future are all illusions of present consciousness. Thus, we do not have to get vexed by the issue of the continuity of subject as there is no such thing (Minami 2018). In fact, nation-states have appeared and disappeared in the world history, like East Timor and South Sudan for the former and the USSR and Manchukuo for the latter. However, the second generation of the Kyoto School philosophers interpreted this differently for the sake of subjectivity. In their political writings, the subjectivity was set a priori in the form of Japan as a nation-state. The philosophers privileged the language structure of the nation-state and mingled this with the adopted Confucian idea of hierarchy and fixed relationality/roles, which meant that they could not accept the Mahayana Buddhist conclusion of no continuous subjectivity. In other words, the whole magnificent story of the philosophy of world history was from the beginning formulated and written to affirm and re-affirm the subjectivity of Japanese. Perhaps it was their own fears and anxieties over their own subjectivity that resulted in an unquestioned and careless use of Japan as a given and established subjectivity.

Third, their assumption of temporality should be investigated in detail. By adopting the Buddhist teachings, their philosophy was largely based on non-linear temporality. For them world affairs were the "self-definition" (*jiko-gentei*) of the history of the "entire whole," and this history was by no means linear or progressive. According to the philosophers, this point was imperative in distinguishing Western modernity and Japanese traditional temporality. However, in their political argument, non-linearity was suddenly pushed to the backstage and Japan's temporal presumption became linear. They argued that Japan was the only nation which fully understood how the world works on the basis of non-linear temporality, thus Japan is a representation or a "self-definition" of the history of the "entire whole." Consequently, they shamelessly contended that Japan has a moral obligation to discipline and train "other" Asian nations to become like Japanese. At this very moment the

narrative of non-linear temporality turned into a progressive linear temporality, and the beautiful story of morality of "inclusiveness" and "harmony" transformed into blunt imperialism (Kosaka et al. 1943, 235).

What lessons can we draw from the Kyoto School's involvement in the imperialist regime? First, relational theories, which are now enjoying a prosperous moment in IR, have substantial potential to provide another reading of the world, but simultaneously contain the danger or impossibility of defining what is the good. Unless we find the way in which a nation-state can become virtuous, relational theories seem incapable of properly addressing the question of ethics and morality. This is particularly so when we take nation-state to be the central actor like the Kyoto School's political writings.

Second, we need to focus more on the power of language. This is the case of relational theories in particular. As a number of non-Western scholars are now taking relationality seriously which presumably promotes fluid and flexible nature of subjectivity, the issue of language should be handled with care. This is because language is directly related to the question of ontology, "what is the world?" Language has the power to fix beings and engulf them by putting the reality into words as containers. In this way, language appears to be deceptive.

Third, more detailed study of temporality is also indispensable. In this, we have to be cautious of the possibility of the narrative of cyclicality, or non-linearity, easily turning into the linear temporality as in the Kyoto School's case. This transformation of temporality entwines linear temporality with idealistic discourses like "inclusiveness" and "harmony." Thus, rather than accepting the easy dichotomies of linearity/cyclicality and competition/harmony, we must first determine the mechanism of how the cyclical and linear temporality are transformed into one another in academic discourses, and how temporality and power interact with each other.

To overcome these problems, we may need to take seriously the first generation's attempt to construct the world on the basis of empty subjectivity and ethics. If we accept the teaching that all nations are empty and just temporary illusions, we may need to revisit the fundamental questions, why IR, why the nation-state, and what is the nation-state anyway?

An Ethics of Understanding

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Bani Adam (The Children of Adam)

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you've no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain!   Sa'di (Trans. M. Aryanpoor)[7]

More than eight centuries ago, in 1258 AD, Abū-Muhammad Musliih al-Dīn bin Abdallāh Shīrāzī, also known by his pseudonym Sa'di, penned down these poetic lines in the *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden), which was at the time—and to this day—an

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[7] While Aryanpoor's translation of Sa'di's poem from Persian to English in Sa'di of Shiraz 1880 [2000]. The *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) maintains the rhyme and rhythm, another translation that is closer to the literal meaning of the poem is the following: Children of Adam belong to one another Who, in creation, are of the same basic matter When one member is hurt by an act of fate Other members cannot remain free of hurt You who are mindless of others' painDo not deserve to be called human (Translated by Kolliyat, quoted in Katouzian 2006, 31).

acclaimed book of Persian prose with stories, anecdotes, and poems about various aspects of human life and humanity. Sa'di (1208–1291) was a thirteenth-century Persian poet, mystic, and traveler (Katouzian 2006, 11). Following the Mongol invasion of Shiraz (present-day Iran), which was at the time part of the Khwarazm kingdom, Sa'di left his native town in the 1220s to study in Baghdad at the al-Nezamiyeh, a well-known and reputed university in the Islamic world. After his studies, he traveled extensively in the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Egypt for a period of 30 years during which he encountered different kinds of people from various walks of life (Katouzian 2006, 13–17). The exchanges, events, and incidents that he experienced throughout his wanderings, such as witnessing the Mongol invasion of Islamic lands or being enslaved for 7 years by Crusaders in Syria (Losensky 2012), were formative for his prose and poetry and the moral teachings, wisdom and humanism that are contained in them. Sa'di returned to Shiraz in the mid-1250s once the instability that ensued following the Mongol invasion had withered (Katouzian 2006, 12). In Shiraz, he first wrote his book of poetry known as the *Bustan* (the Orchard) in 1257 followed by the *Gulistan* in 1258.[8]

Sa'di's humanism is reflected in the poem *Bani Adam* (the Children of Adam). While clearly situated in an Abrahamic, and more specifically Islamic, genealogy of mankind, its moral teaching transcends the religious order in which it was embedded. Through this poem Sa'di expressed that, notwithstanding the differences between humans, mankind is connected to one another since in the end, all humans consist of the same essence or materiality (flesh and blood). Instead of giving priority to a particular (religious) identity and therefore accentuating difference, Sa'di emphasized above all else the similarity between humans. The morality that the poem expresses is one of understanding and empathy among humankind, and Sa'di reasons that it is through the practice of both virtues that humans can be considered humans. Accordingly, if a human(s) is (are) afflicted with pain, others will be equally affected through their capacity to empathize and understand. In contrast, for Sa'di those incapable of empathy, who do not have the ability to understand another's pain, are not worthy to be called humans. In short, for this medieval poet, mystic, and wanderer, humanity and being human were defined by the concepts of empathy and understanding.

During his own lifetime and thereafter, Sa'di's poetry was well-received in and beyond Shiraz, as his fame and poetic ingenuity spread across the Persianate world—stretching from India to Anatolia—influencing the work of many other Persian poets and intellectuals (Losensky 2012). In the context of the onslaught and violence of the Mongols and the Crusaders, Sa'di's humanism was fairly unique. However, among his contemporaries and more specifically, Persian poets with mystical inclinations or Sufis, Sa'di's humanism was not unusual. Indeed, another well-known Persian who was a contemporary of Sa'di and who similarly fled his hometown of Balkh following the Mongol invasion was the Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207–1273). After many wanderings, Rumi settled in Anatolia where he wrote his prolific poems, the *Masnavi-i Ma'navi* (The Spiritual Couplets). Although different from the character and content of Sa'di's poetry, Rumi too espoused a message of humanism and tolerance that could only be achieved through love, since only love neutralizes all binaries as divisions are transcended and replaced by the emergence and establishment of harmony (Chittick 2017).

In today's world, Sa'di's words of compassion, empathy, and understanding continue to be relevant in various socio-political and cultural spheres, including the realm of IR. For example, his poem adorns the entrance of the United Nations building in New York, reminding state representatives of the significance of empathy in interpersonal and/or intergroup relations. It constitutes us as social, ethical,

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[8]For a good, yet succinct introductory reading about the *Bustan* see Wickens (1990). For the *Gulistan* see Lewis (2012). For the complete translation of the latter work, see Sa'di of Shiraz (1880 [2000]).

and moral actors, and it affects the nature and character of our interactions with one another and with other beings. As one of the major human faculties, empathy has been defined, conceptualized, and appraised in various ways in the fields of psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, philosophy, ethics, and literature.[9] What the conceptualizations across all these fields have in common is that empathy is conceived as an affective and cognitive ability by which an individual or group seeks to understand another person's or group's different (cultural) perspectives, feelings, or experiences.

Apart from analyzing the role that various emotions play in relations between states and the decision-making processes of political actors (see, e.g., Steele 2008; Sasley 2011; Hutchinson and Bleiker 2014; Mercer 2014), scholars in the field of IR have also paid attention to the concept and practice of empathy. This scholarship has focused on the theorization of empathy in the realm of local and global politics (see, e.g., Morrell 2010; Pedwell 2014; Head 2016), the institutionalization of empathy within and between states (see, e.g., Crawford 2000; Marlier and Crawford 2013), its significance as a strategy for peace between (former) adversaries in (post-) conflict situations (cf. Broom 2009; Head 2012; Picco and Rifkind 2014), and the importance of practicing empathy in fieldwork so as to transcend the "arrogant" Self in order to understand an Other (cf. Sylvester 1995).

However, what has been largely neglected in the field of IR is the significance of empathy in a teaching or classroom setting. In terms of pedagogy, most curricula underscore the development of cognitive capabilities, but what is often overlooked, even in curricula that are not embedded in a positivist framework, are affective competences and learning. Here the nurturing of empathy is of major importance since it is a "faculty that enables us to feel with another human being, to cognitively and effectively put ourselves into his or her place, and therefore to become aware of the other's feelings, needs, and wants" (Moses 1985, 135). It is thus an ability that allows us to understand both on the cognitive *and* affective levels another person's or being's perceptions and experiences of being in the world. Empathy enables us to comprehend, negotiate and understand differences in a positive way.[10]

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[9] See for literature in various fields on empathy the following (non-exhaustive) overview. In the field of psychology and neuroscience, see for example Moses (1985), Eisenberg and Strayer (1987), Eisenberg and Fabes (1998), Decety and Jackson (2004), Decety and Ickes (2009), Singer and Lamm (2009), Spinrad and Eisenberg (2014), and Persson and Savulescu (2018). In the field of anthropology, see for example Geertz (1983), Hollan and Throop (2008), Throop (2010), Hollan and Throop (2011), and Hollan (2012). In the field of philosophy and ethics, see for example Slote (2007), Coplan and Goldie (2011), Maibom (2014, 2017), and Matravers and Waldow (2018). Finally, in the field of literature, see for example Keen (2007), Harrison (2008), and Eileen (2017).

[10] Neuropsychologists have also highlighted that empathy is not always and automatically positive since it can also increase pro-social behavior *within* a group by which a sense of "we" vis-à-vis Others or an outgroup is reinforced (Mathur et al. 2010). However, when empathy is encouraged and practiced towards "different Others"—instead of towards members of one's own community or group—it does yield positive results as it reduces anti-social behavior, prejudice, and the propensity for conflict. Some scholars remain skeptical about the advantages of empathy. They argue that empathy is always embedded in a particular temporal-spatial context in which power relations are not absent (see e.g., Sylvester 1995; Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2004; Pedwell, 2012, 2014; Head 2016). However, the contexts that these scholars discuss with reference to empathy are of actual violent conflicts or involve major asymmetries of power between a privileged and a nonprivileged group(s). Notwithstanding their critical acumen, I argue that different contexts produce different results. Teaching a classroom of students to be empathetic and to practice empathy towards the "enemy" Other in the midst of a (civil) war or post-(civil) war situation—for example teaching Palestinian and Israeli students in Israel and occupied Palestine—might indeed not lead to positive results. One of the reasons why the achievement of success in such a context is quite difficult, is related to the fact that students are still in the midst of processing their respective individual, family, community, society, and/or country's trauma(s) of war, violence, loss of life, and material, psychological, and emotional deprivations. In such a context, time is key, since it may take generations before traumas are processed. On the other hand, teaching empathy and encouraging its practice to a homogenous or heterogenous group of students in a class that takes place in a country that is not embroiled in an intra- or inter-state physical war facilitates the achievement of positive results because in such a context the exposure to the violence of Others is minimal and/or absent. Finally, while there are also asymmetries of power in the field of IR, an educator still has agency and therefore the choice to actually expose students to difference through the teaching curricula. One can choose to

Inspired by Sa'di's humanism and his emphasis on the practice of empathy and understanding, I have come to encourage an ethics of understanding in teaching IR to students as a way of approaching and learning about a world that is characterized by differences between humans and social groups. Contra Hollis and Smith's (1991) conceptualization of "understanding,"[11] my use of the term operates solely not on a cognitive level, but on an ethical, normative, and affective level as it refers to a particular attitude, approach or way of being. Consequently, in order to be able to understand an Other, one needs to be able to empathize. For without the capacity to empathize, the understanding of an Other on a cognitive *and* affective level becomes impossible. An ethics of understanding requires therefore the virtue of empathy. As a teaching philosophy, encouraging an ethics of understanding has been particularly important in light of the fact that my classrooms are a microcosm of various worlds as students with different national, religious, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds participate in the courses that I—myself a hybrid between the East and the West—teach.

Practicing an ethics of understanding begins with the premise that there are different ways of being and consequently a pluriversality of realities to which students are subsequently exposed. Apart from the encounter with difference in the classroom, students are also exposed to different worlds, thoughts, ideas, concepts, experiences, cultures, histories, and realities through an engagement with various textual and visual sources from different parts of the world. The key to approaching and understanding these differences is one of engagement that is not ego-based, in the sense that one does not enter a debate or encounter with the attitude of wanting to win an argument, to be proven right or better, or to convince others that one's own truths are the only legitimate, ultimate, and absolute ones. Instead, within the framework of an ethics of understanding one is encouraged to first decenter the self so that difference—through a debate, an (imagined) encounter, an exchange—can be approached with an empathetic and open attitude, an attitude of wanting to learn something new and different so as to understand. This may at times be beyond one's own mode of thinking, being, feeling and relating to reality. Yet, despite the fact that one can be enveloped in one's own world, the condition for understanding an Other's distinct metaphysical, ontological and epistemological commitments is made possible by empathy. I encourage empathy during seminar discussions—based on prior engagement with various textual and visual sources—through dialogue, storytelling, and in-class assignments or group work, by which students with different backgrounds are paired together to work together. They not only learn to understand an Other on a cognitive and affective level, but they also learn how to work together and appreciate difference.

Aside from encouraging students to understand difference through the practice of empathy, an ethics of understanding further bolsters curiosity. The appreciation of the experience of being exposed to difference and its subsequent understanding, engenders the interest to explore and to learn about unknown Others. Indeed, since the realization of empathy requires exposure to difference, the more it is trained and attained, the more interest it generates to discover and understand new Others. An ethics of understanding does not, however, turn a blind eye to human pain and injustices in light of understanding practices of violence, discrimination,

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stick to teaching and reproducing the conventional knowledge of the privileged majority—in the context of IR this is for example secular Anglo-Saxon/European IR theories—and leave students clueless about other ways of thinking and being. Alternatively, one can expose students to difference through the chosen topics a course covers and the teaching materials that are used. In short, while there are always asymmetries of power, one also always has the *choice* to challenge them instead of reproducing them.

[11] In *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (1991), Hollis and Smith differentiate "explaining" and "understanding" international relations from one another in the context of the debate between positivism and hermeneutics in the philosophy of social science. Consequently, their conceptualization of "understanding," in contrast to my employment of the term, operates on a philosophy-of-social-science axis.

and exploitation—of humans and non-humans alike—as legitimate because they are justified in terms of a particular system of beliefs. Instead, it encourages a critical attitude towards the admissibility and acceptability of human and non-human pain committed in the name of a particular worldview or way of life through the practice of empathy with those that suffer within and beyond it.

Overall, through an ethics of understanding students are encouraged to approach difference in an empathetic and reflexive way so as to acknowledge, understand and celebrate its existence instead of concealing, silencing or subjugating it. Doing IR differently in a pedagogical context, therefore, involves the development of affective capabilities *in tandem with* the development of cognitive capabilities through an emphasis on and encouragement of practicing empathy by means of an ethics of understanding. Due to the unabating internationalization of education, the fight for equal rights and inclusion of marginalized groups in society that were previously closeted and excluded—e.g., the LGTBQ-community—, and the global movement of labor, difference is increasingly becoming more perceptible in (homogenous) societies across the world and thus in our classrooms. In the context of these developments, an ethics of understanding is and will continue to be pedagogically relevant for it not only teaches students how to relate to difference, but also reminds them that we are, in the words of Sa'di, "members of a whole, in creation of one essence and soul."

Teaching a More "Rooted" IR!

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"*But*" is a simple, three-lettered word that holds the power to trigger a vibrant chain of contrarian thinking. I face it quite often during my IR classes, teaching politics of the South Asian region with students arguing, "*but, that is not how it is,*" in my *biradari* (community), village, town, state, and so on. So, a characteristic challenge one faces in teaching IR lies in applying its theories and concepts in a manner that suitably equips students to learn, negotiate, and critically interrogate the world around them especially from a position located in the global south. A fundamental problem arises from the *disconnect* between the singular epistemic frames and homogenizing character of many core concepts of IR and their diverse, if not divergent, ground realities. Such problems are faced in teaching not only for the realist theories with their state-centric narratives driven by an unceasing pursuit of material power but also for the constructivist and critical theories that have introduced a much-needed corrective in focusing on the discursive power of ideas and norms and on the social identities of various social and political communities alongside the states. This is partly because both positivist and post-positivist theories remain grounded in the European and/or Anglo-American histories without a candid debate on how it shapes and circumscribes their conceptual frames. More importantly, they share the same existential assumptions privileging the principle of "separation" over "relationality" for understanding the social world. While the realists' core proposition revolves around each state's security dilemma in the face of perpetual threats from "others" beyond its borders, the basic building block of the constructivist notion of identity is grounded in differentiating the "self" from the "other," thus, rendering difference per se as a potential source of friction, threat, or conflict. The world may appear or be experienced very differently if discerned from the vantage point of a different set of civilizational values, as I will explain with reference to India.

I have been experimenting with a pedagogic technique of making students "travel back in time" in *the* history (read the European history that forms the bedrock of

the meta narratives and theories of IR) and *theirs* (read local histories). A juxta-position of the textbook formulations against our collectively shared "pasts" and "present lived experiences," I find, creates an intellectual space for students to gain a basic understanding of how some of these knowledge categories, which the disciplinary practices of IR take for granted, came to be constituted in the first place—historically, socially, and politically. The purpose of this exercise is not to fathom their histories as such but to try and understand how our "ways of knowing," creating knowledge and theorizing have evolved. Let me explain this briefly with regard to the question of identity in the Indian context.

An individual and collective group identity in the pre-colonial India was a re-lational, contextual, and social phenomenon. People living in communities fol-lowed elaborately codified rules of social differentiation although their sense of belonging, and solidarity was not based on political considerations (Kaviraj 1995, 116). Identity had different meanings in different situations and acquired a dis-tinct social character shaped as it was by its local socio-cultural milieu. So a Bud-dhist in Kashmir Valley, for instance, was influenced by the older Shaivite tradi-tions, while in Ladakh s/he was prone to traditional Bonpa influences and later dominated by Tibetan Lamaism (Hewitt 1995, 31). Similarly, Kashmiri Hinduism and Islam had distinct local characters, markedly different from Hindu practices and Sharia Islam elsewhere in India. Elsewhere, the promise of syncretism was re-alized through the *bhakti* tradition, which became the pervasive form of religious expression in most of the great cultural regions of India in the medieval period and also "represented a fusion of Dravidian elements with the Vedic, or Aryan, religion that had penetrated the South centuries before (Embree and Hay 1988, 207–208).

Contrary to the Western model of universality, which is premised upon a self-other binary in which the other's agency and identity must necessarily be negated, Hindu culture's universality does not require the suppression of difference, given that each of the particularistic identities that comprise it are viewed as legitimate and equal parts of a unified whole (Tickner 2003, 304). All the major indigenous religious traditions in India can trace their roots in the cosmic, moral social order of *dharma* (in a conversation with Ashis Nandy). According to Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, the universe is sustained by *dharma*. The basic meaning of *dharma*, a word derived from the root *dhr*, "to sustain," is the moral law, which sustains the world, human society, and the individual. This is the moral realm par excellence, which is constituted by the notion of "debt" or "the owing of an obliga-tion to others." According to Krishna (2012, 17–8):

> The "others," in the Hindu tradition, include not only persons, but
> also ancestors, gods, plants, animals, earth, sky, and so on. The con-
> cept is wide enough to include all realms where the "other" happens
> to be an empirical "other" with whom one can enter into a relation-
> ship.

This drastically contrasts with European history that is replete with stories of systemic religious persecution including that of Christians, Pagans, Jews and later Muslims ending in decades-long crusades, which eventually led to enshrining the principle of "*cuius regio, eius religio,*" meaning that the religion of the ruler was to dictate the religion of those ruled at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, later confirmed in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The Indian civilization had trodden a very differ-ent path wherein a new religion was rarely imposed by a ruler on its subjects. People would gradually accept it because its egalitarian principles or absence of rituals ap-pealed to them. So, a Muslim king could celebrate Hindu festivals and visit Hindu shrines and a Brahmin could compose hymns and prayers for Hindu deities in the Persian language. Since the reconciliation between much older practices and newer

beliefs evolved in the social domain over a long period of time, a collective identity was not immutable since conversion to another faith did not result in obliterating old beliefs and traditions. The Kashmiri Brahmin (priest) for instance would drink water given by a Muslim, eat the food cooked in a Muslim's boat, and even justified mutton-eating introduced by the pre-Aryan tribes, namely Pisacas. Furthermore, Kashmiri Muslims modified the rules of Islamic jurisprudence to suit their needs (Punjabi 1990, 103, 111).

The colonial power, the British, introduced an entirely new cognitive apparatus of figures, maps, and numbers—the census—that imparted a sense of territoriality to identities by imposing "dualistic either-or oppositions as natural, normative order of thought" and taught people in the subcontinent that "one is either this or that; that one cannot be both or neither or indifferent. ... Orthodoxy of being was gradually replacing heterodoxy of beings" (Miller cited in Kakar 1995, 196). This materially changed the self-perception of communities. For example, people were indeed Hindus or Muslims before, but under the conditions of modernity, their perceptions of the collective self as the majority and minority community changed fundamentally, which then became the dominant norm in the political sphere, most starkly resulting in the partition of India in 1947. Though this continued shaping the politics of post-colonial India, it has not completely altered the social fabric of the Indian society. Nandy explains that this is because accommodation of other faiths and cultures in the Indian context is of qualitatively different nature partially because these are not imposed from above; they constitute a form of lived experience, and, they actually lack an element of self-consciousness in the sense that it has evolved organically over a longer durée (Ashis Nandy in Lal 2000, 58). So, notwithstanding the modernist trends of exclusionary ideologies and hardening group boundaries, several communities still retain their plural identities. For instance, castes such as Jats and Rajputs come in three varieties—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. They do not intermarry and inter-dining is limited, but they do retain highly nuanced, complex relationships amongst themselves, preserving their separate religious identities and a common Jat identity. Such communities are not exceptions. In fact, nearly 600 communities or roughly 15 percent of all Indian communities, documented by K. Suresh Singh's mammoth survey of communities of India, see themselves as having more than one religious identity—of simultaneously being Hindu and Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim, or Hindu and Christian (Singh 1994).

It is important to reiterate that the rationale behind "traveling back in time" and juxtaposing the European history with local histories is *not* to read or posit them in a binary mode or present it as a parallel universe *nor* to glorify the latter. As much as students must learn to "provincialize Europe," it is equally important to learn to problematize their own "pasts" because all inherited value systems, for instance the caste-based practices of discrimination that still persist, are not good (Chakrabarty 2007). The idea is to make students aware that the universe for thinking through the knowledge categories is not singular but plural, which is why they must first understand how such knowledge categories are generated *before* imparting them knowledge about particular concepts of IR to help them better understand the "disconnect" between the textbook formulations and their lived realities. Not only does this make the discipline less alienating but also opens up their minds to more fundamental questions such as what counts as legitimate knowledge? *Who* creates it? What role do the scholars and students play in re-producing it?

They also learn that if they choose to include a "non-dualistic mode of thinking," as suggested by the Indian traditions, for understanding the world cast in a "dualistic, "either-or," oppositional mode of thinking," difference may no longer or necessarily be an a priori source of friction and threat. Through the class discussions, for instance, they seek to understand how the plural societies of South Asian states, as indeed in many other parts of the world, are torn by conflicts because

their socio-cultural diversities are viewed as a political threat by the homogenizing impulses of the modern states. What lies at the root of most such conflicts—between various ethnic, linguistic, or religious communities and/or between such communities vis-à-vis the state—is a fundamental inability on part of their political leadership to view differences and diversity as a source of strength rather than fear and danger (Behera 2007, 362). Bearing in mind the divisive nature of such thinking and politics, recovering and exploring the dynamics of a non-dualistic mode of thinking that does not generate a "fear of the other" may well provide more effective ways of engaging with differences in both personal and political realms of our lives. At a deeper, more fundamental level, students begin to understand that choosing a mode of thinking is ultimately a matter of *choice*, which has deep social and political consequences. Those students who are inclined to pursue research learn an important lesson in not trying to find a "fit" between the given theoretical frames and their own lived realities and field experiences and instead attempt the reverse, that is, let the field *speak* in order to bring about innovations in IR theories and concepts. Doing so also inspires me to treat my classroom debates not simply as a site of knowledge dissemination but as a part of our shared endeavors in knowledge creation.

Doing Difference and Similarity Relationally: An Analysis

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Current theorizations about world politics rest on a basic existential assumption of separation that converts difference into otherness that is at worst, threatening and at best, inferior. This forum has sought to move beyond thinking about interactions as occurring between atomistic units present within a singular, universal field of knowability toward more constructive approaches rooted in a relational lens.

In conclusion, we review how logics stemming from distinct existential assumptions allow us to think through difference and similarity differently. The implications of interacting across worlds constituted through distinct assumptions are then examined before closing with a list of next steps for a relational agenda in IR.

Differing Logics about Difference and Similarity

When we change fundamental existential assumptions, we can see how they are in themselves generative of distinct logics that make for dissonant takes on what seems to be, in appearance only, the same phenomenon (Blaser 2018, 48–49). Central to understanding difference and similarity are both the either-or logic that arises from assuming separation to be the primordial condition of existence and the both-and logic stemming from the embrace of interconnection. To draw out the lessons from the essays more clearly, this section first introduces the critical differences between the complementary-opposite existential assumptions of separation and interconnection to address subsequently how they lead to very distinct logics of engaging difference and sameness. We then illustrate the dynamics of these logics across the essays as a way to identify some important questions for IR.

Embracing separation as existential presupposition results in perceiving objects, things, or units as existentially autonomous. This ontological *in*dependence translates into a categorical or substantialist approach to reality that in turn reinforces

an exclusive either-or logic. Moreover, the resulting binary thinking (Querejazu this forum) or teleological measuring sticks (Trownsell 2013, 290–295) are employed to gauge what is to be excluded and included. So even though two options exist in a set of complementary opposites, like difference and similarity, the drive here is to identify and aspire towards the superior one while at the same time excluding at minimum or eradicating at maximum the inferior one (Lajo 2003, 146–147).

Ontologically privileging interconnection translates into a very different conceptual world. Instead of attributing existential autonomy to the parts, the assumption that all is interconnected drives perceiving relations first and ontologically *inter*dependent *components* second. Moreover, those supposedly clear defining lines between categories in a separation-based lens here are emergent, momentary, and fleeting. This places attention on the specificity of the here-now time-place and generates a panorama of components that are not so "in-corporated" or "corporeal." Boundaries are porous and interpenetrable, allowing us to imagine multiply inhabitable beings. Finally, the both-and logic corresponding to the primordial presupposition of interconnection allows us to embrace multiplicity, because it does not demand the use of a teleological logic for understanding the world.

With regards to difference and sameness, a separation-based lens, due to its teleological outlook, most often celebrates sameness and perceives difference as a threat because it disturbs the naturalized expectation of sameness.[12] In contrast, difference and sameness are not embodied when assuming interconnection; they constitute dynamic, complementary-opposite *tendencies*. As tendencies, every being has a particular, always changing "proportion" in the pair. For this reason, relationalists argue that we have to pay attention to *both* when examining interactions. At the most basic level, difference through a both-and logic of opposites is considered a source of richness. Arian's discussion about empathy attests to this appreciation. Other relational traditions see diversity as being integral to and even constitutive of life itself. This is why Querejazu talks about how complementary opposites are conscientiously "encountered" in productive tension in the Andes for the purpose of "proportionalizing" what are normally considered to be mutually exclusive elements through a separation-based lens (Lajo 2003, 168). This transformative encounter is only possible through the different other.

The essays by Querejazu, Behera, Reddekop, and Shani proffer specific lessons about how distinct relational traditions have been capable of co-existing in diversity. In contrast to seeing interlocutors as either the winners or losers of an interaction through the afforded logic of separation, Querejazu shows how a both-and approach allows each component to be transformed through the encounter with difference, *tinku*. Once we are sensitized to the possibility of this transformative process that takes place in the *taypi*, or in-between "space of mediation and connection," we can engage encounters of difference in a potentially more constructive fashion due to the recognition of the *need* of the different Other for this process to occur. This discussion complements Behera's point about how *dharma* disrupts the easy binary of self-other through the interpenetrability that becomes possible through the porous, contingent boundaries of components of relation. Reddekop then echoes this point when talking about the Amazonian Quichua: "Selves are at once localized and limited in their experience but also continually composed, grown, and mutually differentiated through relationships" (this forum). This particular dimension of the both-and logic allows us to imagine the simultaneous expression of multiply held identifications.

This forum makes a significant contribution by exemplifying the existence and embeddedness of the both-and logic in vastly different cultures across the world, from South America to East Asia and from South Asia to the Middle East.

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[12] Arian (this forum) forewarns against doing empathy work in perceived-to-be-homogeneous contexts, because it does not foment the appreciation of difference for this reason.

A relational Andean perspective, for example, affords the "and/or" as a logical possibility. While "identities can be defined in terms of both western/nonwestern depending on context, time, space, and relation," Querejazu shows how one can *also* be one thing at one time (an urban "Westernized" person) and an other at another (indigenous person) (this forum).[13] Shani's non-dualist examples of Sikhi also illustrate the fluidity and multiplicity of identifications available through the specific here-now point:

> The absence of firm boundaries between Sikhs and other communities mean that, especially before the colonial period, Sikhs could also be members of other cosmological communities…Furthermore, the communal kitchen, the *langar*, in Sikh temples (*gurdwaras*) caters not only to the congregation but to all, including members of other faith traditions (this forum).

While in the West this may seem contradictory, it is possible to imagine a world where people can simultaneously express multiple (cosmological) identifications. Behera enhances this discussion by taking into account the multiply overlapping historical cosmological influences whereby "a Buddhist in Kashmir Valley…was influenced by the older Shaivite traditions, while in Ladakh s/he was prone to traditional Bonpa influences and later dominated by Tibetan Lamaism" (Hewitt 1995, 31 cited in Behera, this forum). All cases demonstrate how the both-and logic shares a capacity for multiplicity.

Moreover, these distinct longstanding geocultural references can clearly illustrate how the globalizing drive to homogenize existential assumptions to a separation-based model have severely reduced the diversity of ways of being (cf. Shani, Behera, Reddekop this forum). Behera highlights how the exclusive either-or logic of colonial modernity introduced by the British through the Census in India constituted an "[o]rthodoxy of being [that] was gradually replacing heterodoxy of beings" (Kakar 1995, 196 cited in Behera this forum). *Sikhi* underwent similar ontological capture: "The colonial encounter, in an attempt to render *Sikhi* intelligible to a Western social imaginary, transformed *Sikhi* into Sikhism and erected religious boundaries between Sikhs and followers of other religions" (Mandair 2009 cited in Shani this forum). Not only did the limiting nature of this categorical thinking "materially [change] the self-perception of communities" (Behera this forum), it generated epistemic and political violence, which is then palpated in Behera's need to create an IR classroom context that relies on local histories to help students first literally re-member and then re-validate the kinds of knowing to which they have access.

Another important form of multiplicity, non-anthropocentrism, becomes available in this collection as a political possibility when the form of relationality is not based on human language, meaning that these multiple worlds are not just constituted by and through humans alone. In Behera's discussion of *dharma*, for instance, Krishna (2012, 17–18) clearly includes beings of all sorts in his definition of possible "others" who are then capable of participating in the melting of the self-other dichotomy about which Behera later speaks. Reddekop illustrates how this works in the Amazonian Quichua community. Through this non-anthropocentric understanding of the human, a person can both transform and be transformed through her relations to land and to other species.

Together these essays clarify how the both-and logic, derivative of embracing interconnection as the foundational existential assumption, works when understanding the different-same other-self. While this section shows the mutual

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[13] Here we witness the "sometimes contradictory" nature of identifications discussed by Wilcox (2014, 613) in contrast to identity. The performance of an identification, in keeping with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, does "not reflect an underlying reality, but *materialize*[s] reality in ways always unstable and subject to multiple interpretations" (Butler 1990 cited in Wilcox 2014, 613).

intelligibility extant across distinct cosmological expressions of relational thinking, the variations too are quite remarkable. One distinction centers around the ethical implications of each stance. For instance, both *dharma* and its conceptual companion *karma* and the Andean cosmological drive to constant proportionalization of the complementary-opposite elements place strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of being intertwined with all that is through one's thoughts, feelings, and acts. In contrast, Shimizu's biggest concern with the Kyoto School version of relationality is its apparent lack of ethics that seems to stem from the focus on nothingness as the generator of the eternal present. Here the ethical impulse stays at zero, since "the subjects or relationship ... do not exist before the spontaneous relationship takes place" (Nishida 1947 cited in Shimizu this forum). Another theoretical variation over time also becomes evident through the clear differences in relational theorizing between the first and second generations of the Kyoto School. Thematic variation is also pronounced. For example, only two directly contemplate difference beyond the anthropocentric realm (Reddekop and Behera, this forum) while the others focus more on the human element in their writings.

These divergences can be explained in two ways. First, these renditions of relationality come from distinct trajectories, geocultural experiences, and specific accumulations of interactions, and therefore show variation in foci and emphases.[14] Second, we may also be witnessing the impact of embracing interconnection to differing degrees (or in different moments), which necessarily bears distinct fruits with their own ramifications.

This area of study is so young in the discipline of IR that any of these cases would merit further research, particularly in light of the important questions they pose for IR. As Behera suggests, how might these relationally based examples "show us a way out of the atomistic conceptualizations that found the modern democratic political system and towards other imaginable alternative political systems"? How do these more static and exclusive logics continue to inform theorizing in IR, even in those traditions that boast a particular focus on identity? How could we recover a conscientious awareness of these multiplicities in political life? How could we hone the ontological flexibility that would permit more profound theorizing about the multiple sovereignties that Shani addresses (cf. Picq 2018)? Finally, how would non-anthropocentric approaches revamp how we conceptualize and strategize about the Anthropocene in IR (cf. Chandler 2018; Malette and Stoett 2018)?

Across Ontological Terrains: Interacting across Worlds

Several lessons also arise through the essays about what happens when interactions take place across worlds founded on distinct existential suppositions, of which ontological translatability and ontological reductionism are primary concerns. The ontological status of a given concept or phenomenon changes when one moves from a separation-based lens and its concomitant either-or logic to a relational lens and its constitutive both-and logic. Thus, even though we think we are talking about the same cup on the table, the ramifications in terms of how we see, interpret, and strategize about it are going to be very disparate due to the lens we employ. Those whose perception of phenomena is founded upon a separation-based lens do not have to consider concomitantly the phenomenon in question as a *component* of relation that is *attached* to other components. This contemplation is optional. When other components simultaneously appear on the ontological register, the relation is still assumed to be uncertain and secondary due to the prior assumption of separation, making their conceptualization still prone to ontological reductionism. When people who embrace the condition of separation engage fruits borne through robust relationality, they simply cannot grasp the whole relational picture

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[14] This allows for the emergence of relational concepts that are what Bilgin (2012) has called "differently different."

as one would through a relational lens. As this does not disrupt their field of view in any way, it does not compel them to question their own existential suppositions, and this further reinforces epistemic violence, which can quickly transmute into political violence.

In his essay, Shani clearly laments the loss of the message of *Sikhi* after undergoing a process of ontological capture through a reductionist lens: by turning *Sikhi* into the religion Sikhism and Sikhs into "an ethno-religious community," *Sikhi*'s "emphasis on a radical equality inclusive of caste, creed, ethnicity, or gender" was erased. In another example, the separation-based nature of the English language obliges Reddekop to expand our understanding of "human" in an effort to recuperate the missing dimensions of a non-anthropocentric *runa*. Through this more robust picture of *runa*, he demonstrates how the ontologically reduced notion of "human" does not really constitute an equivalent. He also shows how translation across ontological terrains is risky business due to all of the subtle complex notions that go into a concept like *runa*. The problem though is that since human and *runa* seem to be pointing to the same thing through a separation-based lens, which cannot visualize or grasp what is missing, it is subsequently also impossible to fathom *from the perspective of a separation-based lens* how these concepts are ontologically untranslatable.

This leads us to ask what else we might be missing in our understanding of the existential expressions of the Amazonian Quichua. In one case how might our understanding of the relationship between human *runas*, other species *runas* and *aucas* be truncated due to the predominant naturalization of assuming separation as the primordial condition of existence? What is getting lost in translation? In another instance, once the land and other species are ontologically understood as live beings with their own forms of agency, what else do we need to understand to radically reconfigure how we understand political community, nation, territory, social contract, and treaties?[15] In what ways are we limited by using an anthropocentric lens to conceptualize these common IR concepts? Shani helps to map some of that "unimaginable terrain" from the perspective of a separation-based lens when he discusses the possibility of simultaneously expressing multiple sovereignties. While through a reductionist lens the *Sikhi* principle of sovereignty would be seen as a competing contender against the national version, he asserts that these forms of sovereignty do not have to be mutually exclusive through a both-and logic.

Another expression of ontological reductionism can be found in the binary thinking that accompanies more Western understandings of universals and particulars. Shani and Behera both lead us to contemplate how we might understand this set of complementary opposites through a more robustly relational lens. Behera outlines the difference:

> Contrary to the Western model of universality, which is premised upon a self-other binary in which the other's agency and identity must necessarily be negated, Hindu culture's universality does not require the suppression of difference, given that each of the particularistic identities that comprise it are viewed as legitimate and equal parts of a unified whole (Tickner 2003, 304 cited in Behera this forum).

This description leads us to the question of whether Acharya's proposed "pluralistic universalism" could qualify as a non-binary strategy. Shani contends that it cannot, because it still seeks to fit all voices under a singular, "large, overarching canopy with multiple foundations" (Acharya 2014, 649–50 cited in Shani, this forum). Shani instead suggests that "*Sikhi* moves us beyond this

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[15] It is important to contemplate too how these forms of agency are not necessarily commensurate with the agency endowed to stones or hyperobjects through the object-oriented ontologies characteristic of the new materialisms (Morton 2013; Cohen 2015).

conceptualization by acknowledging the existence of plural universalities within the cosmos" and proposes that we explore *pluriversality*, or "the existence of multiple universalisms which may intersect and influence each other" but are not subsumed to a singular Global IR (this forum).

All of these cases exemplify how a relational lens generates a completely different panorama, and as such point to the potential of intentionally switching existential suppositions for doing IR differently. This endeavor though is not without its challenges. It takes much effort to make visible that which is invisible through a separation-based lens when translating across ontological terrains. Moreover, these efforts often face active resistance and delegitimation. Additionally Shimizu warns of the perils of using relationality in a world where most people continue to insist on separation by calling our attention to a historical case in which a relational approach was used to justify imperialism. We can draw several lessons from his contribution about the theoretical and political risks of relational logics in light of the disastrous effects of the Kyoto School's collusion with Japanese imperialism. While one possible conclusion could be that relational thinking and power relations simply do not mix, it is also possible to tease out how these unexpected results emerged through interaction across ontological worlds.

Three possible, not necessarily exclusive, explanations become available. First, this situation may have arisen due to the type of relationality espoused within the Kyoto School given that distinct geo-cultural trajectories foment distinct versions of relationality. Since this particular version does not have an explicit ethical dimension, supporting the political elites was not necessarily articulated in terms of its ethical consequences. Second, while the philosophers may have been speaking the "beautiful language" of relationality (especially in the first generation), they were engaging with authorities of the political realm, who grasped their ideas through separation-based lenses. The resulting interpretations were prone to the effects of ontological reductionism and to the application of a teleological measuring stick, which then made it possible to use relationality (harmony, balance, etc.) as a way to reaffirm the superior lifestyle of the Japanese and rhetorically justify dominating Others due to their difference from this position. Third, perhaps the reductionism did not take place during the politicians' filtering of the philosophical concepts. Maybe the Kyoto School philosophers themselves were already providing ontologically reduced conceptualizations by not employing a robustly relational lens. Shimizu's acknowledgment in the change in philosophical style between the first and second generations of the Kyoto School may attest to this.

This case allows us to contemplate the impact of embracing differing degrees of relational commitments, generated by embracing interconnection at some point posterior to a prior commitment to separation. When the relation is embraced after having presupposed separation as the basic existential condition, the logic that corresponds to deep relationality unravels, which means that we begin to lose the most important lessons of robustly relational understandings of the world. The degree of unraveling depends on the relative proportion between, and the particular "timings" of, the two assumptions in relation to one another. Because relational thinking succumbs more easily to separation-based approaches and not the other way around—a very important point to keep in mind when interacting across ontological terrains—this movement can be considered the "slippery slope" between robust relationality and separation.

Those embracing a robustly relational ontology can enter this slippery slope in a variety of ways. First, the sheer weight of interacting with those who use reductionist lenses eventually leads to a feedback loop whereby relational fruits start to be understood in the ontologically reduced sense even by those who introduced the more relational concept. Second, when others use hierarchical binary constructions to judge the fruits of interconnection through the incommensurate lens of separation, it is very easy to get drawn into reacting to this thinking with the same logic,

thereby commencing the slide. This slippery slope makes it possible for relationality itself to move from a focus on the both-and proportionalization of the elements to a hierarchical scheme, where one approach is deemed better or higher even if it is being called a relational philosophy. Shimizu's essay importantly cautions that the relational turn in IR itself needs to ensure that it does not slip ontologically and turn teleological, because that is the point at which the different Other is no longer appreciated. To avoid this situation, the next section reviews the kinds of knowledge and skills that we would need to foster.

Further Exploring Relationality

This forum has introduced on three planes, a conceptual (Querejazu and Reddekop), an empirical-historical (Shani and Shimizu) and pedagogical (Arian and Behera), a toolbox for relational thinking, research and teaching in the field of IR. At the same time, it has provided a glimpse into the presence and embeddedness of the both-and logic across vastly different lived histories of societies across the world. Our explorations and reconceptualizations of difference and similarity through a relational lens also resulted in the identification of many, much broader implications and some serious risks that require further examination while building a relational theory agenda within IR. To use relationality as an alternative ontological commitment and therefore distinct tool for conceiving, perceiving, and engaging with difference, similarity and existence, various areas of future work present themselves. First and foremost, to become clearer about how existential suppositions impact understanding, we must begin to recognize more generally in IR that ontology does not just start by identifying and disputing over what units or categories exist. This is preceded by prior assumptions about existence (Jackson 2011, 28).

Next, we need to become more aware of how each ontological commitment affords distinct and often incommensurate fruits by identifying and building theoretical constructs and models. Toward this end, focusing on more robust versions of relationality is recommended for they provide the starkest contrasts to conceptualizations and understandings that are the outcomes of a separation-based lens. This exercise of contrast highlights how not everyone subscribes to the same prior assumptions and as such draws our attention to how they world distinctly. By becoming aware of these various forms of worlding and by understanding better what happens logistically in interactions across these worlds, we can develop tools for ontological translation with which we may engage Others more effectively.

Achieving greater clarity on the subtle differences among relational traditions is also central to this project. Through the juxtaposition of distinct relational approaches from around the world, we can better appreciate overlaps, parallels and disjunctures, much like Ling's (2014) effort and that of Nordin et al. (2019). These exercises could give insight into how variation in the degree of relational commitment affects what is conceptually and theoretically afforded. As we see through Shimizu's sensitivity, these research endeavors should also keep a focus on who might or already is being marginalized from that particular relational perspective.

Finally, once we become aware of how we co-create through the existential suppositions that we embrace, we will understand the importance of our job as "cultivators," not just producers of knowledge, as Shilliam (2015) suggests. While this certainly applies to how and what we research, it also importantly relates to our position as teachers. Having more tips for implementing the "ethics of understanding" introduced by Arian would be important for encountering one another in all of our differences in a productive sense of learning to be in/among people with different standpoints. We can also learn to use the classroom, as Behera suggests, as an active space to re-member and legitimize that which has been unraveled through the (colonial) encounter with separation. Both authors exhort us to think about how we might use relationality to foment alternative capacities among students for

engaging multiple standpoints and underline the importance of nurturing more relational pedagogical strategies.

In a world where the differences among people continue to fuel civil strife, war, racism, xenophobia, inequality, and other forms of violence and marginalization, developing subtler tools capable of engaging greater complexity and fomenting ontological flexibility is absolutely critical. Becoming more flexible means *adding to* our "methodological" toolbox for understanding and engaging the "Other," not diminishing it. Besides improving our perceptive capacity of other forms of worlding, honed ontological translation skills can also reconfigure how we conceive of what diversity means and what may be at stake in these different conceptualizations.

Acknowledgments

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