The Personal Is the International: For Black Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough

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ABSTRACT   *The article reflects on why I opted for Political Science as my career. It tells of a society where once black women could only imagine themselves either as maids, teachers or nurses—this was my mother's world. The narrative shows how a racialised and gendered history shapes both my hopes for a particular kind of international relations theory and practice, as it shapes my frustrations and anxieties about my own future in the discipline. I also locate my place in the discipline within broader global 'disruptions' that see previously marginalised actors moving to the centre of international life. I also attempt to demonstrate that international relations today is located in globalised peace but within localised extremes of poverty and privilege. I make the case that the challenge to International Relations (IR) theory today is to find a language, a new language, in which to articulate the contradictions of a globalised peace that exists within localised extremes of poverty and privilege.*

'Corn,' said Glen, 'there's a man at Stanford who's changed everything for me. He's everything I want to be. 'Who is he?' I asked. 'St Claire Drake. He's amazing. He's inspired me like no one else. He's a black intellectual conversant with any idea you can throw at him. At the same time, Corn, he's filled with humility. His fundamental aim is to connect the life of the mind to the struggle for freedom. He's grounded in the struggle for black freedom, but he's also a universalist who embraces all people. He's a professor. And that's what I intend to be. A professor.' ... At that moment, something clicked. Something turned. Something changed ... A teacher. A professor. *Connecting the life of the mind to the struggle for freedom*. That was it. That would be my life. (West and Ritz 2009, 59, emphasis added)

Introduction

This reflection on my choice of Political Science, especially International Relations (IR), as a career begins with this extensive quote from West's

memoir *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud* (2009), where he reflects on how he chose academic life as his vocation. While I cannot claim that my own decision to work in the academy is as eloquently expressed as is West's in this conversation with his friend Glenn Jordan, a lot of what West says in this resonates with my life, thinking and experience on the issue. Since receiving the invitation to contribute to this 40th anniversary of *Politikon*, I have wrestled with the various moments and experiences that placed me on the same career path. I have also spent many sleepless nights crippled with self-doubt about whether at all I have the potential to rise to this occasion and be both a facilitator and producer of new knowledge in an old journal.

Similar to Cornel West, I would like to think that my contribution is a commitment to *connecting the life of the mind to the struggle for freedom*. But today, this seems a romantic view of academic life which is often said to have been overtaken by a neoliberal agenda. As my colleague Louise Vincent has put it, nowadays 'the job of the educationalists is simply to supply students with the skills to participate effectively in the race for individual achievement' (Vincent 2004, 106). In this environment, it certainly is more challenging for both students and their teachers to devote themselves to intellectual life—as Vincent (2004, 106) also notes, education seems to be

> simply another product whose value can be assessed in similar terms to a loaf of bread, a car, or a television set … individual consumer choice and satisfaction rather than the world of political ideas, communities and social relations are the benchmark against which success is measured.

With this prevailing agenda in higher education, the question for the individual seeking out a career then becomes this: Why would one want to devote oneself to intellectual life? Is it still possible or meaningful to connect the mind with the struggle for emancipation for me as teacher and, as importantly, is this still an ideal that I can instill in the next generation (of educational consumers)?

But to return to the beginning

In his delivery of the 2013 E. H. Carr Memorial Lecture at the University of Aberystwyth, Peter Vale argued for the importance of 'self and site' as a way to underscore the 'ways in which the story of IR can be told differently' (Vale 2013, 12). Quoting Carr, Vale tells us that 'site-specificness' is valuable for intellectual work because the 'point in which procession at which … [the writer] … finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past', thus Carr advises that 'before you study the history, study the historian' (Carr in Vale 2013, 4).

In reflecting on my background, it is important for me not only to think through what it means to be a scholar of IRs in this particular global moment, but also to recognise that 'doing' IR within a black female body is an act of transgression. Let me explain. I view doing IR in a black female body as a disruption of the everyday order of business in my chosen discipline which has been accused of being 'so thoroughly masculinized that the workings of hierarchical gender relations are

hidden' (Tickner 1992, 8). So, I accept the iconic feminist invitation that the 'personal is the political' and take it to mean that choices are:

> neither isolated nor exclusively the result of one's own natural inclinations, nature, talents and choices [because] individual lives are deeply embedded in, defined by and reflective of the broader social context, and the structural limitations which they are framed. (Mkhize 2005, 117)

This brings us to the title of the piece which speaks to my own endeavour to help shape thinking and teaching about (and in) IR, by embracing the inseparability of the actor and the structure. In recognition of the complicated nature of the frames which shape my ability to conceive of myself as able to think about the 'international', it is critical therefore that I locate myself as a young black woman. In order to do this, I take inspiration from Harris-Perry's recent book, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America/For Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough* (2011), which is an adaptation of Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enough.* Harris-Perry (2011, 2) argues that

> African American women face unique expectations as citizens of the United States. The particular histories of slavery, Jim Crow, urban segregation, racism, and patriarchy that are woven into the fabric of American politics have created a specific citizenship imperative for African American women—a role and image to which they are expected to conform. We can call this image the 'strong black woman'. It defines the mantle that the nation, black communities, and black women themselves expect African American women to assume. The social construction of the black women's citizenship and identity around the theme of self-sacrificial strength is a motif in black women's lives and politics. The strong black woman is easily recognizable. She confronts trials and tribulations. She is a source of unlimited support for her family. She is motivated, hard-working breadwinner . . . she has an irrepressible spirit that is unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty and rejection.

The author's central argument is that 'the strong black woman myth is a misrecognition of African-American women' because this image of 'super strength' it presents obscures the day to day suffering of black woman against structural poverty and discrimination by 'defining endurance as natural' and thereby robbing African-American women of the ability to engage freely in the public sphere and 'demand resources to meet their individual needs'. She argues that while the image of the 'strong black woman' creates a 'standard for self-improvement and racial empowerment, [the strong black woman] also encourages silence in the face of structural barriers' (Harris-Perry 2011, 21–299).

In the South African context, and despite the role women played in South Africa's liberation struggle, Gqola (2007, 115) points out that the discourses around gender in the country's public landscape remain largely 'conservative in the main'. This is because many women still continue to be marginalised as actors in the public sphere, where the pervasive masculine and militant nature of the South African state today leaves the majority of South African women socially, politically and economically in the periphery with no option but to find 'strength' outside of the state.

The image of the 'strong black woman' was historically exampled by the thousands of black women who worked as maids in white homes under apartheid (see Cock's *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*, 1980). These women endured appalling levels of racism and economic exploitation; playing the role of 'mammy' or 'Mavis' in order to provide for their families, often as breadwinners, in the homes where husbands were either jailed by the government, working as poorly paid migrant workers or forced to flee the country. The image of the 'strong black woman' is also captured by the image of the female guerilla fighter with a rifle over one shoulder and a baby in her other arm (see Cock's *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa*, 1991).

Motsemme (2004) in her seminal paper *The Mute Always Speak: On Women's Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, argues that the experiences of black South African women's 'everyday' as 'an ongoing site of violence' has been under-theorised. The experiences of oppression of these women has usually been labelled as 'resilient', or 'strong', and thus failing to render visible the 'pain, suffering, humiliation and joy' that the women experienced (Motsemme 2004, 923–924).

This is why I tell the story of my mother's world where black women could only imagine themselves either as maids, teachers or nurses. I wish to show how this racialised and gendered history shapes both my hopes for a particular kind of IR theory and practice, while it also shapes my frustrations and anxieties about my future in the discipline to which I am dedicated.

In her important text, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), the African-American intellectual—bell hooks—acknowledges that growing up in the (near-apartheid) American South, working class black girls effectively had three main career choices: 'We could marry. We could work as maids. We could become school teachers' (hooks 1994, 2). Despite the limits presented as to what one could achieve in a racially segregated society, she recognised that the opportunity to learn, even if one could go only as far as being a teacher, was a 'counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization . . . [by] . . . enacting a revolutionary pedagogy that was profoundly anticolonial . . . [because] . . . it reclaimed the humanity of black people as capable of using "our minds"' (1994, 2). Similarly, in South Africa, the classroom functioned as a site of political contestation and witnessed, for instance, in the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, which offered an alternative revolutionary pedagogy to the oppression that symbolised all that apartheid education offered Blacks.

It was the same resistance to racial misrecognition that gave my mother the spirit to persevere throughout high school, walking barefoot, each day, to school in the haunting winters of Lady Frere in the former Ciskei homeland. She speaks rarely of these difficult days, and I can only imagine the many stories that remain unspoken about the suffering she went through to access a better life. The youngest of six children, she was the only one who managed to finish high school. For her sisters, school ended when marriage started. Upon finishing high school, among the top science students in the Ciskei, she could choose

between becoming a teacher or a nurse. Of course, like bell hooks' portrayal of the Deep South, she could have simply chosen to marry (or, indeed, marriage could have been chosen for her) as it was the case for her sisters. But she did both—choosing nursing first, and later, on her own terms, finding a man from Pondoland to marry. She is the image of the 'strong black woman', she is the breadwinner of our family, and she supports her siblings; everyone knows that when all breaks loose, 'Zodwa' will come up with a plan. She often jokes that the fact that she is a psychiatric nurse allows her to handle and compartmentalise her life in order to appreciate the good and the bad, from the numerous funerals of family and friends that she attends almost every weekend, to being married to a raving alcoholic. In our community, she symbolises quiet strength, but I have seen first-hand the emotional and physical toll it takes to be everyone's hero. It is not just my mother who is a strong female figure in my life, there are many women who are the same way, and many of them are her friends. I love them all, but I did not want to be like them. Theirs was a life of seeming perpetual domestic crisis.

One of the reasons I performed well in school was to ensure that I would be accepted in a university that would be as far away from home as possible. Granted, Grahamstown is not exactly 'far away' if one is from Umthatha. But the physical distance from the emotional and physical demands of being the only girl at home and being my mother's confidant meant that at the very least I could manage my emotional engagements with the family. The distance from home allowed me to search for a different path in life that would hopefully lead to a different direction than that of the women I know and love. I wanted something else from life, a life that was not only based on duty to family. I deeply hoped for a life that would allow me to immerse myself in things that are deemed abstract instead of the all-important immediate.

Oliver Tambo told his biographer Callinicos (2004) that when growing up in rural Bizana surrounded by the Engeli Mountains, he always wondered what lay beyond the Engeli Mountains, beyond the mundane everydayness of rural life. I was in third year of university when I read Tambo's biography; on many occasions, I would weep because I realised that although Tambo was forced into political life and therein exile, his life indicated to me that a whole world laid beyond the Engeli Mountains. I wanted a taste of what Tambo experienced!

I am often reminded of the book *A room of one's own* (Woolf, 1929, 40–106) in which, asked to reflect on women and fiction, Virginia Wolf explains that she was able to lead a writing life because her aunt, Mary Baton, had left her 500 (British) Pounds a year. This allowed her for the first time the

> . . . freedom to think of things in themselves . . . that building, for example, do I like it or not? Is that picture beautiful or not? Is that in my opinion a good book or a bad? Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me . . . intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time . . . that is why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own.

I cannot quantify my mother's legacy for me as Wolf does of her aunt. She walked herself barefoot into a nursing diploma so that today I can be working towards my fourth degree, a PhD. Today my brothers and I are able to tell her to take it easy and do those small things that she enjoys, like missing one 'all important' family ceremony to attend the National Arts Festival so that for a couple of days, she can only concern herself with the dizzying schedule of fitting into one day a theatre show, dance show, and of course a jazz show. Middle class problems!

The feminist slogan of the personal as the political does not allow me to attempt to deliberate on how I came to do what I do today without recognising that in the beginning, one quiet black woman in rural Ciskei had to gather super human strength so that today I would not have to be strong—at least not in pre-determined way.

The international is personal: 'talking left so as to walk right'?

> In the beginning, politics gave birth to war. Better: in the beginning, politics was war. The story of politics and war in the Western tradition does not unfold as a fall from grace, a tale of sordid descent from a bucolic age when people peacefully went about their business and let their neighbors peacefully go about theirs. Instead, it is a tale of arms and the men. (Elshtain 1987, 47)

> the war of 1914–18 made an end to the view that war is a matter which affects only professional soldiers, in so doing, dissipated the corresponding impression that international politics could safely be left in the hands of professional diplomats. (Carr 2001, 3)

In the aftermath of the First World War, the discipline of IR was charged with how the 'thinking' of IR was to influence the 'doing' of IR through 'a passionate desire to prevent another war' (Tickner, 1992, 9). Thus the aforementioned Jean Bethke Elshtain quote, that 'in the beginning, politics *was* war' is an accurate representation of the historic preoccupation of the discipline. Today, thankfully, there is a recognition that security is not just the absence of war but rather demands the discipline to take seriously many issues that shape the 'security dilemma' in the 'international' such as: poverty, the environment, media, gender, HIV/AIDS, human rights, race, the economy, religion, culture and many others too. As argued by Lawson (2012, 1), 'all these issues are underpinned by profound normative concerns—that is, concerns with how the world *ought* to be' (emphasis added).

In many ways in spite of the resilience of sovereignty marking the local from the external, it is a difficult if not impossible task to discuss the 'local' and 'international' as distinct spheres. Hendricks (2011, 6) has argued that the dismantling of Cold War dynamics of binary representation and the so-called 'new wars' of the 1990s that wreaked havoc in many countries in Africa has provided a space for the reconceptualisation of the concept of security in IR as 'traditional security paradigms were fast becoming irrelevant in explaining the apparent shift from inter-state to intrastate conflict' (Kaldor 2006). Thus today we discuss poverty not as a development issue, but as a security issue in the so-called security-development nexus which gained currency in the 1990s under the concept of human security,

championed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (see, for example, the UNDP (1994), *Human Development Report*). When I follow the United Nations conferences on environmental security, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, human rights and other non-traditional 'hard politics' issues, with the ease of cross border communications, it seems that there is a willing global audience even for those issues that were usually left to the domestic or totally ignored. These days, the corrective rape of black lesbians in South African townships has resulted in an international outcry from thousands of citizens across the world through various online petitions, pressuring the South African government to punish the perpetrators harshly.

Zakaria in *The Post-American World* (2009) shows that the minute to minute broadcasting of everyday international life can give one the illusion that the world today is perhaps more violent than it was decades ago. This moment of the 'international' seems to be a noisy place that is difficult to escape. The feminist claim that if the 'personal is the political', then inevitably, the 'personal is also international', becomes difficult to challenge, whether you call it 'globalisation' or 'interdependence'. But what does all that mean?

Enloe argues that accepting that the personal is the international 'multiplies the spectators . . . [in IR], it especially adds women to the audience, [it however] *fails* to transform what is going on stage' (Enloe 1989, 196) (emphasis added). Enloe goes on to argue that 'the implications of a feminist understanding of international politics are thrown into sharper relief when one reads 'the personal is international' the other way round: *the international is personal*. This calls for a radical new imagining of what it takes for governments to ally with each other, compete with and wage war against each other' (Enloe 1989, 196).

So, if Zakaria is right, 'the rest', i.e. the Global South, has made some advances into mainstream IR in the images of China, India and Brazil and in some ways South Africa. For instance, in a world, *my* world, where the current minister charged with running the country's international relations is a woman, her predecessor—also a woman—now occupies the chair of the African Union, it presumably is an exciting space to be an African and a feminist, and to be thinking 'internal'. This is in a space where previously Africans have only been in the margins, and where African women have been little more than an enigma in international life beyond their image as hapless victims of collapsing African states. Dunn (2001, 1–55) has argued that the escalation of civil wars in Africa which revealed the grave extent to which African states were 'unable to claim a monopoly on the means of violence, legitimate or otherwise' meant that for a long-time Africa as a region was misrecognised in the international system as not having 'meaningful politics, only humanitarian disasters'. Nkiwane (2001, 280) has alluded to the deeply ahistoric dismissal of Africa in the concerns of the 'international' as the trivialisation of Africa's place in IR rarely mentions that 'colonialism and imperialism in Africa existed parallel to the development of the canon of IR'.

But contemporary Africa, with fewer wars, fewer mass killings and seductive economic growth rates in countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Tanzania, adds African countries as legitimate actors in the international

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stage. It is a development that makes a dream of a young woman like me of making a life out of thinking about the 'international' not seem trivial or abstract. It follows, then, that those who count as the 'new African voices' in IR as part of the collective of 'new voices' from the Global South in general, have the potential to offer new norms in the *doing* and *thinking* of the international. Yet what are the chances of transforming what happens on the international stage? For one, Cornelissen (2009, 24) suggests that the

> Deeping of multilateral ties in the current international arena has had mixed results for the African continent. The profusion of South-based multilateral bodies has in fact weakened rather than bolstered Southern solidarity, as competing for representation in different planes of international engagement, the leading countries of the South follow variable agendas. This does not seem to have resulted in an autonomous voice for the African continent.

For instance, the persistent question about the purpose of the BRICS grouping is about the kind of values that Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa stand for. In this regard, Shaw, Cooper, and Chin (2009, 38) have argued that it is important to ask, for instance, 'which BRICs countries are democracies? Which have functioning civil societies and independent media? . . . which have significant inequalities, leading to alienation, opposition and societal violence?' As response to such questions, Bond warns that these countries present themselves as 'talking left' while 'walking right' (Bond 2013, 257). For Bond BRICs member countries are not a transformative force as they seem to be preserving regional stability for their own looting. This

> in turn is met with worsening political and civil rights violations, such as increased securitisation of societies, militarisation and arms trading, prohibitions on protest, rising media repression and official secrecy, debilitating patriarchy and homophobia, activist jailings and torture, and even massacres. (Bond 2013, 267)

While within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, Nathan (2012, 8) has consistently maintained the view that the region is failing to achieve common security due to an absence of 'common values' among member states whose record shows that they value regime security at the expense of human security owing to an anxiety to preserve national sovereignty due to authoritarian tendencies within states. South African overtures to the 'centre' have to be juxtaposed with an increasing militarisation of popular protest and the hopelessness of daily life for ordinary South Africans.

It seems to me then that this generation of scholars of IR, and especially those of us coming from the Global South, have to be extra vigilant about how we think through this particular international moment. This moment presents itself as less burdened with the liberation struggles of yesterday, yet the harrowing levels of global inequality and intimate violence indicate that there is a need to think carefully about how we currently understand the workings of power and the language we use to articulate the possibilities for an emancipatory project. In the following section, I propose that the task for my generation is to find a new language that divorces itself from the known in the attempt to understand the security dilemma.

Possibilities for new African voices in IR

Holloway, in his book *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (2002), identifies two problems with our conception of revolution, first being the obsession with revolution through state control, and an obsession with the concept of power. Holloway goes on to argue that power has been a central aspect of how we make sense of both internal and external relations. In the domestic, the focus has been on winning state power and supposedly subordinating it to the ends of the interests of the masses. In the 'international', the focus has been on understanding the struggle for power between states in the attempt to understand whether war is an endemic and unfortunate aspect of the 'international' or if peace is a possibility. Holloway argues that the problem with searching for power in both the local and external is that, as Enloe posits above, it fails to transform what happens on the stage; instead, 'that realism is the realism of power and can do no more than reproduce power' (Holloway 2002, 18).

I find Holloway's invitation intriguing if not absolutely necessary. It seems to me that the task for the next generation of scholars of IR has to be the ability to find a new language to articulate privilege and poverty. How do we account for the 'betrayal' that many black South Africans feel about the everyday violence that shapes their lives even though the coloniser has supposedly been displaced from *his* seat of power? How do we account for the fact that in 2013, half of Africa's one billion population lives on less than one dollar a day 50 years after independence? How do we account for the growing underclass in the West?

Nkiwane (2001) has argued that

> The fundamental rights and freedoms advocated by liberal theories were applied historically in a racialized and exclusive manner in the African context, with liberalism virtually on this selective application. The question of historically accumulated privilege is an important question for the liberal discourse, because it asks, 'whose rights?' ... if apartheid is understood, as the liberal discourse would have us believe, as the denial of individual civil rights, then the restoration of these rights through the legislative elimination of discrimination would point towards a remedy ... If, on the other hand, apartheid is understood as a denial of collective socio-economic and political justice, then a remedy would of necessity need to examine redress of the collective legacies. (285)

The South African experience already informs that the transformation through the individual rights discourse is limited in its emancipatory possibilities as collective socio-economic and political justice continues to be found wanting. It also tells us of the continued need to locate national discourses within the workings of the international. Neocosmos (2006, 358) has argued that the problem with the dominant liberal human rights discourse is that it disables 'political thought, as it remains squarely within what might be called a 'descriptive'—because fundamentally technicist—mode of politics'. He argues that the emancipatory limitations of this discourse are that it is 'fundamentally moral rather than political, conservative rather than transformative' (Neocosmos 2006, 358). Often when I think of the dilemmas of social transformation in South Africa, I fail to see how, presently, the government can do differently within the constraints of an international

political economy (IPE) that is resistant to equity (but not to the point of excusing the governments militarisation of the state, increased violence against its own people, as evidenced by events at Marikana in August 2012).

Although IPE especially since the 1970s and 1980s makes links between desperate local poverty conditions to the structure of the global economy, I agree with Jones (2005, 996) that much of this attempt to emphasis poverty and international inequality has not provoked a 'significant rethinking of the core body of IR theories'. The popularisation of the concept of human security as an attempt to further articulate the intimate links between domestic and global threats has been met with fair criticism that such attempt aim more at 'collapsing' the relationship between the domestic and international instead of 'opening up their relationship' (Buzan 2004; also see Paris 2001, 2004; Chandler 2008). However, the 'untidiness' of such terms as human security should not discourage us from widening IR scope from an almost exclusive focus on the 'high politics' to paying attention to the international relations 'from below'—where the 'majority of human kind lies beyond IR's epistemic perimeter' (Vale 2013, 2).

Elshtain (1987, 245) claims that we need to search for a '*language* in and through which to express the sentiments of civic life and the dangers and possibilities of the present historic moment'. If the discipline of IR is to remain relevant, it seems to me that, as scholars recognised in the aftermath of the First World War that questions of war can no longer be treated as the anxieties of soldiers and diplomats, there is an urgency for this generation to be courageous and honest to this context even if it means divorcing ourselves from the known.

Quoting Marcela Serrano, Holloway posits that perhaps a different way of making sense of the gross insecurity in which many people across the world continue to live is not to ask who has power but rather to ask 'where is dignity?' (2002, 19). In May 2012, I attended a brainstorming session on *Gender, Peace and Security in Africa*, hosted by the African Leadership Centre in Nairobi, where scholars and activists of gender, peace and security were mapping out 'current discourses, research and practice and identify[ing] research gaps on gender, peace and security' (Hendricks and Ndungu, 2012, iv). Despairing at the lack of substantive transformation in the security sector discourse, Funmi Olanisakin proclaimed that we need to begin to 'look at security from the spaces from which we are dying'. I read this as echoing Enloe's invitation to subvert our lens and view the international as the personal. The feminist archive and the so-called 'African worldview' offer ways in which we can imagine and articulate a different 'international'.

Sandra Harding in the *Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities: Challenges for Feminist Theory* (1987) argues that often what has been identified as the 'African worldview' which is 'less interested in individual autonomy'—thus much more concerned with 'relations to others and to nature'—is 'suspiciously similar to what the feminist literature has identified as a distinctively feminine world view'. Harding (1987, 299) further extrapolates the ways in which the 'African worldview' and the feminine worldview share 'similar ontologies, epistemologies and ethics':

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To Europeans and men are attributed ethics that emphasize rule governed adjudication of competing rights between self-interested, autonomous others, and epistemologies that conceptualize the knower as fundamentally separated from known, and the known as autonomous 'object' that can be controlled through dispassionate, impersonal 'hand and brain' manipulations and measures. To Africans and women are attributed ethics that emphasize responsibilities to increasing the welfare of social complexes, and epistemologies that conceptualize the knower as a part of the known, the known as affected by the process of coming to know and that process as one that unites manual, mental and emotional activity. (Harding 1987, 303)

Harding challenges feminist theorists who 'attribute unitary world views to women and men' while ignoring the 'social contexts of being black or white, rural or industrialised, Western or non-Western' (Harding 1987, 300). She further argues that what is similar between the 'African worldview' and the feminist is that they are both 'categories of challenge' which seek to challenge 'in the thinking and social activities of men and Europeans, [that is] what is relegated to 'others' to think, feel and do . . . the return of the repressed.'

Conclusions

I have located myself in my discipline: this location is amidst many broader global 'disruptions' that have *seen* previously 'unlikely' actors in IR moving to the centre of international life; it is a reflection on my own journey to making IR my 'home' of choice or, to shift the metaphor, a room of my own. My attempt is to show that women and the formerly colonised have to break the mould of their own history in order to be able to enter IR.

I have also attempted to demonstrate that IR today is located in globalised peace but within localised extremes of poverty and privilege. In doing this, I realise that although it seems that the challenges for contemporary IR scholars may appear as less daunting as those of 1919, it seems to me that we need to find a language, a new language, in which to articulate the contradictions of a world of extreme and obscene privilege and violent poverty which characterise the present political economy.

Notes

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