Come to Africa: A Hermeneutics of Race in International Theory

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[The Republican congressional class of 1994 should] come to Africa. . . . In Rwanda and Burundi, no one is asked to pay for Head Start, unemployment insurance, Medicaid, national service or student loan programs. Instead, they just have a brutal competition for scarce land, energy and water, in which Tutsi and Hutu take turns downsizing the other tribe in order to grab more resources for their own.

The end of the Cold War and the advent of the information age have upset the old adages that guided the study of international relations for the past fifty years. To many, these events have all but given an aura of inevitability to US (and Western) hegemony and vindicated liberal democracy and late-modern capitalism. As a result, vast numbers of comparative analysts have rid themselves of the theories of imperialism, dependency, uneven development, and others that once sought to explore the political and institutional context of late-modern inequities between states, nations, classes, and genders. Under the guise of restoring agency and cultural perspectives to past and present historical processes, these theorists have rediscovered comparative analyses of cultures and civilizations as means to explaining the uneveness of modernity. But their speculations on the origins and trajectories of the different regional entities of the international order remain grounded in subtle notions of “race” and their relations to progress and modernization. Thus, where once analysts sought to advance social justice by examining social relations, power, and the nature of material transactions among entities, the new theories now assume the inevitability of the present order on the basis of the supposed civilizational attainments, cultural dispositions, and work ethics of the inhabitants of the different regions of the globe.

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Typically, these explanations depend upon a reverse orientalism that extols the economic achievements of the “Asian Tigers”; a cultural determinism that faults African cultural practices alone for the underdevelopment of that region; and a refashioned Weberian notion of work ethics to explain away class and regional differentiations within the international system. Such approaches frequently oppose culture and agency to structures and institutions in order to favor the former. Moreover, they place “culture” and “agency” outside of their structural and institutional contexts and, as a result, substitute the presumed “habits” and “dispositions” of “regional” groupings for the culture and agency of their constituent members; hence, the habits and supposed cultural dispositions of Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans, especially as these are expressed through institutions, which are said to spur or hinder their sociopolitical advancement and economic modernization.

Despite numerous disclaimers by its adepts, the new scholarship shows a near disinterest in the historical role of the various agents of the moral order for the purpose of elucidating their performance and the ethical bases of their actions. Nor have they shown any sustained interest in the historicity of modernity, the function of the language of progress, and structuring effects of different civilizational (or modernizing) agencies. The result, intended or not, is the racialization of history and historical processes such as international relations. By the racialization of international knowledge, I do not mean to impute racist motives to international theorists: I simply mean to stress the use of analytical methods that uphold ethnographic allusions associated with a hermeneutics of race and culture. Often, such hermeneutics depend upon incomplete historiographic data that serve as central axes for understanding power (sovereignty) and subjectivity (self-determination) within the moral order. To date, no international-relations theorists have based their distinctions between civilized and uncivilized upon a comprehensive comparative investigation of Europe and other regions in regard to “historical traditions,” “political morality,” and “cultural dispositions.” They all appeal to racial clichés and oversimplified notions of culture.

A good deal of the present debate over the “state” of IR echoes nineteenth-century debates and ontology. Like the slavery for which it once stood, “Africa” has emerged to the large Western public yet again as a metaphor for a number of evils: failed states, AIDS, poverty, corruption, and “fratricide.” The multiplicity of these signs of evil and despair allows for multiple allusions to race without the inconvenience of falling prey to a natural-history ontology of race, civilization, and culture, particularly in relation to supposed regional performances and ethics. But such allusions still racialize international
knowledge and thus provide a basis for the exclusion of nonwhites from the essential decision-making fora of the moral order.

This article examines the process of “racialization” of IR theory—the internalization by international-relations theory of the modern ontological discourse pertaining to civilizations, cultures, and race. The two central questions concern how the “West” became “white” and came to exemplify cultural adaptability, political competency, and ethical versatility, and why “Africa” became “black” and the symbol of international dysfunction. The short combined answer is that Africa has served as the counterpoint to the European trajectory in order to provide the justificatory trope for the ontology of international relations, morality, hierarchies, and structures of authority and legitimacy. The latter refer specifically to a certain Western claim to moral authority as provider of rules and models to the rest. To be sure, Western theological and intellectual traditions have varied in their ideological and political outlooks. Similarly, practitioners and theorists of international relations differ in their politics, ideologies, and their methodological approaches. As all intellectual movements and disciplines must contain tensions and contradictions, the field of international relations has generated dissenters and insurgents in the West and elsewhere who have taken on as their object the very constitution of the discipline: its epistemology, ontology, and teleology. Whether successfully or not, these dissidents and insurgents have attempted to meet a recognized need and an admitted challenge. The need is to deal with the asymmetry of power relations between the constituent entities of the international order comprehensively. The challenge is that, in confronting the pathos of the international order and the discipline, theorists must deal with and detach themselves from the racial (or generally ethnographic) presuppositions of the established methodological and philosophical foundations from which they wish to depart.4

I am interested here in the implications of a reluctance among IR theorists to historicize modernity, colonialism, and the postcolonial situation. Specifically, I focus on the tendency to attribute the causes of global inequities to degrees of adaptability or inadequacy of local and regional institutions. Indeed, it is not uncommon for theorists to make explicit allusions to the endowment of the “races” and, therefore, to link political “dysfunction” and poverty with race and culture. Robert H. Jackson, in particular, calls for an analysis that, in the context of Africa, establishes such connections between poverty, culture, and race, only to bemoan that “political correctness” may preempt any discussions of this “taboo subject.”5 Central to Jackson’s rationalist method and jurisprudential analysis is a hermeneutics that uses dated ethnographic allusions to race (and culture) and incomplete
historiographic data that serve as central axes for understandings power (sovereignty) and subjectivity (self-determination) within the moral order. There are also theorists who, unlike Jackson, have contrasted African and European agencies and cultural dispositions without conflating them with racial cultures and habits, but have nonetheless rearticulated the modern ontological discourse.6

A general skepticism about Africa’s capacity to function like other continents permeates the working papers of international institutions (notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), official Western policy statements, and the writings of other specialists on Africa and the black world. These documents and reflections frequently juxtapose the ingenuity and charitable dispositions of the West with the discipline and dexterity of Asian states for the purpose of contrasting them with the absence of foresight in Latin America and the cultural deficiency of Africa and the black world beyond it. Their views of Africa are generally grounded in the supposed proclivities of its rulers and their acolytes and kin to bring chaos to independence-era stability and ruin to previously functioning economies through economic mismanagement and embezzlement. As a result, only a minority of theorists and practitioners of international relations are moved by principle to insist on a quest for global justice. The more generous observers still advocate solidarity on the basis of humanitarianism or empathy. The least charitable, however, have suggested that Africa be either left alone to drift or be submitted to “more intrusive forms of international trusteeship.”7

Theory and Practice:
Consternation, Tensions, and Contradictions

Moral philosophers and historians of ideas have bristled at the notion that their disciplines may offer a venue for examining the relationships between political developments and such received ideas as “race.” To them, the connections between political events and received ideas are not tangible, although many may concede that theorists and policymakers often share the same political imaginary: thus the protestation that “practice,” or the process by which Europe constructed the modern symbolic universe, is neither the foundation for the philosophical imagination nor the proper basis for exploring conquest and the subsequent institutions of racism, colonialism, and slavery among others.

Tzvetan Todorov defends the post-Enlightenment humanist/modernist project against such insinuations: “To attribute colonial expansion or ‘the division of Africa’ to the humanist project of exporting
the Enlightenment is to take at face value what was only propaganda; an attempt, most often a clumsy one, to replaster the façade of a building constructed for quite a different purpose. The reasons for the colonial conquest were political and economic, rather than humanitarian.8

Race and the idea of it are not unique to the West; nor do they manifest themselves in academic disciplines in a linear, formal, and reflective fashion. According to Walter Mignolo, it “seems to be a feature of human intelligence” to discern differences—extending to “race,” “nationality,” “culture,” “religion,” and the like—comparatively “by identities and vice versa.”9 Such comparative attitudes, which extend to all human capacities and dispositions to engage in related speculations, are not limited to the West or to its presumed Greek and Roman predecessors. Indeed, it would be excessive for anyone to intimate that “theory” has been the accomplice of “practice” or that “practice” has always been the actualization of “theory.”

Todorov is mistaken, however, in denigrating the motivations of postcolonial critics in order to defend Enlightenment ideologies such as humanism. Such positions, too, are excessive and unwarranted. The central argument for most postcolonial critics is that theory and practice are mutually constitutive. This is to say that the relation between theory and practice is mediated by time (the periods of reception of core ideas and assumption) and contingency (the political context of their interpretations), which together bring about symbolic shifts (in the associations and meanings connected to these ideas). Both theorists and practitioners are swayed by temporal symbolic shifts and the historical meanings of ideas for purposes of their own legitimacy. In either case, individuals and collectives are guided by their own and others’ values and relative powers. Actors adapt to historical contingency just as theorists take into account the collective’s understanding of their ideas.

In this context, postcolonial critics are interested that Western philosophy paid sustained attention to discovering the universal and particular properties of “civilizations,” “cultures,” “religions,” “nations,” “races,” and the like. Specifically, philosophy produced an ontology of difference due to race. This ontology emerged during the Renaissance, survived through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment debates on the nature of the moral order, and spanned nineteenth-century scientific racism to the present. This post-Renaissance attention to self and others has not been purposeless or innocent. The European understanding and interpretation of race evolved in time according to contingent circumstances and the relative power of what was to become “the West,” after the Renaissance. The discovery, conquest, colonization, and the transatlantic slave trade facilitated the
ascent of Europe to hegemony. The historical circumstances of this ascent affected Europe’s perceptions of and relations to the rest. Around the sixteenth century, Europe began to demarcate itself from the rest by inventing symbolic and substantive differences that served as a basis for a hierarchy of values, cultures, and civilization. According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot,

the invention of the Americas . . . , the simultaneous invention of Europe, the division of the Mediterranean by an imaginary line going from the south of Cadiz to the north of Constantinople, the westernization of Christianity, and the invention of a Greco-Roman past to Western Europe were all part of the process by which Europe became the West. What we call the Renaissance, much more an invention in its own right than a rebirth, ushered in a number of philosophical question to which politicians, theologians, artists, and soldiers provided both concrete and abstract answers. What is Order? What is the State? But also and above all: What is Man?10

Coming on the heels of the “discovery” of the New World and its conquest and colonization by “Europe,” the various philosophical movements amalgamated as the Enlightenment produced, as they reflected on European expansion, slavery, and colonialism, “race” as a marker of difference.11 These eighteenth-century thinkers and their critics did not uniformly support colonialism, slavery, and racism. Yet, according to Trouillot, “colonialism, pro-slavery, and racism intermingled and supported one another without ever becoming totally confused. So did their opposites. That allowed much room for multiple positions.”12 The Enlightenment-era multiplicity of opinions and related political ambiguities and contradictions all but disappeared during the nineteenth century. There occurred then a retreat from earlier debates as scientific racism gained a much wider currency, “further legitimizing the ontological nomenclature inherited from the Renaissance.”13

The modern ontological nomenclature originated innocuously in the human and social sciences with the progressive “racialization of the West” in accounts of the European ascension to hegemony and related technological advances.14 From the seventeenth century onward, according to Ivan Hannaford, theorists inspired by René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and others “[set] aside the metaphysical and theological scheme of things for a more logical description and classification that ordered humankind in terms of physiological and mental criteria based on observable “facts” and tested evidence.15 The methodological shift that they unleashed propelled Enlightenment ideas on the body, mind, and the national character, all related to race, and their formalization later in theory. The eighteenth
century was also an age of social revolutions on the North American continent, in France, and in Haiti. These revolutions generated a multitude of contradictions, ambiguities, and tensions in philosophy and politics as well as between the two. Theory exacerbated the dilemmas of politicians, while politics exposed the paradoxes of theory. By the nineteenth century, physical anthropology, literary criticism, biology, and history converged in the natural-history movement to secure the ontological standing of race in modern thought.

The progressive pervasiveness of race in theory is manifest in writings on government, society, and related institutions by the Baron de Montesquieu, David Hume, Johann Blumenbach, Immanuel Kant, Gotthold Lessing, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Johann von Herder, and Edmond Burke. In fact, some of their speculations are drawn on self-conscious ideas of race. Similarly, the collective of jurists and moral philosophers and historians who pioneered the methods and “languages” of modern international politics—diplomatic history, international theory, and international law—espoused the prevailing methods and their base ideas of race. James Lorimer expressed the authoritative imperial view when he proclaimed that the findings of ethnography on the attributes of the races are to be the foundation of the “institutes of international law” and “jural relations of the separate communities.”

A Hermeneutics of Race in “International” Theory

The history and migration of the idea of race from philosophy and the human sciences to political theory and international relations theory is neither straightforward nor uniform. Without indulging in a history of ideas and of race, I contend that the idea of race was transported from its philosophical home to speculations about the global order during the Renaissance and was further encoded in the new disciplines of international law and diplomatic history after the discovery of the New World, leading to conquest, imperialism, and colonialism. The means to this migration was the elevation of supposedly unique European attributes as both reason and justification for its actions abroad. Beginning with Nicolo Machiavelli, post-Renaissance theorists displaced Christian theology as the proper guide to human affairs in favor of material explanations of power and ethics. This new trend was complemented later by Hugo Grotius, Puffendorf, Christian Wolff, Emerich de Vattel, and others who desired to incorporate European understandings of society, government, property, and related institutions into their own justifications for rival political and commercial claims in Europe and elsewhere. As
I show later, these analysts privileged ancient Greece and Rome as source for inspiration; but subsequent generations injected novel views of race and civilizational endowments into their own speculations. The centrality of race and the supposed accomplishments of the races increased in direct proportion with the capacity and willingness of Europe to colonize and build empires.

Again, I do not intend to suggest an intentional partnership between philosophers and the builders of empire. Nor am I suggesting a direct line of descent from philosophy and the history of ideas, on the one hand, and international-relations theory, on the other. There remain qualitative or epistemological differences in the manner these entities approach their objects. Yet, international theorists could not resist the temptation to emulate their counterparts in philosophy and the historians of idea in looking strictly to the European "past" for inspiration. But they did so in light of events in Europe. Thus, seventeenth-century theorists such as Hobbes (in England) and Benedict de Spinoza (in the Netherlands) adopted the accounts, writings, and ideas of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, and others as their own in their speculations on the causes of war and the means to peace. Despite this unity of sources, they espoused conflicting ethical stands and political positions based on contradictory views of the religious and political conflicts that beset Europe and the applicability of canonical dictums to their own circumstances. So did their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterparts—Abbé de St. Pierre and Rousseau (in France) and Kant (in Prussia)—draw on the same sources without fully agreeing in their interpretations on the causes and solutions to war.

Like philosophers and historians of ideas before them, modern international theorists contributed to the invention of Europe, encompassing Greece and Rome but excluding their eastern associates in the Ottoman Empire and their southern and southeastern neighbors and partners in North Africa. However, the invention of an exclusive Greco-Roman past for Europe was not simply a question of origin. It helped such theorists as Montesquieu, Hume, Blumenbach, Kant, Lessing, Fitche, Herder, and Burke to cleanse Europe and western Christendom of its historical and intellectual and spiritual debts to other regions, cultures, and civilizations. They all tackled the nature of the moral order and in fact commended a knowledge of its cultural, civilizational, ethnic, and racial units. As I indicated earlier, they all proclaimed the superiority of Christianity over other religions; of "Europe" over other regions; of Western rationality over non-Western belief systems; of property over use; of sovereignty over other forms of government associated with the inhabitants of territories conquered by the West.
The underside of Westernization was the whitening of Europe in history and the human sciences. Again the process was not uniform, but it allowed early modern international analysts and their followers to appropriate the essential values of humanity on behalf of Europe. It also effected a pretense that depreciated the involvement of Europe in the violence that marred the coming into being of modernity, European ascendancy, and empire. Accordingly, theorists generally rid their accounts of judgments connected to conquest, slavery, colonialism, genocides, and expropriations. Thus, despite their comparative perspectives, Grotius, Puffendorf, Wolff, Vattel, and other pioneers of international law and ethics did not expound on the fact that the modern forms of European expropriation of the infidels differed from the practices of commercial exchanges and the hospitality afforded to Europeans elsewhere.\(^\text{18}\) In short, despite the advantage of comparative analysis and ethnographic knowledge, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment theorists were swayed by political circumstances and ideologies to view intercultural and transregional relations in light of inflections on ancient Greek topos, medieval Christian theology, and Renaissance “Italian” metaphors and dictums.

The Westernization of the essential attributes of human civilization and the rationalization or omission of the violence of modernity on the margins of Europe in the empire came to pass as the acceptable approach to and representation of international relations. Here, despite the advantage of comparative analysis and ethnographic knowledge, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment theorists were swayed by political circumstances and ideologies to view intercultural and transregional relations in light of inflections on ancient Greek topos and medieval and Renaissance Roman metaphors and dictums. Machiavelli and Hobbes, among others, provided the maxims on the uses of power and sovereignty that obscured centuries of political cooperation, commercial exchanges, and cultural cross-fertilization between Europe and other parts of the world. From the nineteenth century onward, philosophy, history, literature, and their derivative subjects and fields of study were no longer encumbered with attention to pluralism, difference, complementarity, and hybridity. They had all succumbed to natural history, nationalism, and the naturalization of politics, particularly in relation to the racial and ethnic origins of “nations” (and states).

The nineteenth-century shift toward natural history, nationalism, and the naturalization of politics consecrated the notion of race, racial superiority, and racial privilege in analyses of international relations. The related sedimentation of race in international knowledge was facilitated by three events: the advent of British hegemony; the
formalization (or naturalization) of the politics of the balance of power; and the appeal to Anglo-Saxon international analysts of the ideas of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Barthold Georg Niebuhr. Specifically, the German historian’s ideas were consistent with the ontology of natural history, the prevailing intellectual movement in Britain. Indeed, Niebuhr held that “the true historical perspective of Greco-Roman life should be race, not politics.”

He thus cast his examination of the past in light of “the temper and character of the races, as demonstrated in their close affections, common names, and kindred blood and color.”

The net effect of the above events and reflections was to enshrine, inter alia, Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, on the one hand, and Grotius, Rousseau, Kant, and Woodrow Wilson, on the other, as trustees of “international morality” and executors of universal standards. These individuals yearned to impart wisdom to European sovereigns and states and, in doing so, to bring about solutions to the recurring violence and political instability that transformed the face of Europe from the seventeenth century to the middle of the twentieth. Whether they succeeded or not, their eloquence indicates that many captured the spirit of their times. Consistently, their political maxims hold lessons for the present. On the other hand, one need not belittle the canonical accounts of the causes and remedies of war and chaos to wonder why Hobbes, the Abbé de Saint Pierre, Rousseau, Kant, or Wilson and other Western thinkers remain the sole inspiration of today’s scholars of international relations.

The answer to this question is not straightforward. Yet to Arnold J. Toynbee, the question is pertinent because the actualization of modern Western maxims and standards of international relations have failed for three centuries to bring about their desired goals of peace and stability. One explanation for Western belief in the superior ontology of its own canons is set out by Toynbee as the persistence of “egocentric illusions” “due to the world-wide success of the Western Civilization in the material sphere.” Indeed, Western ascendancy to political and economic hegemony led to the “the misconception of the unity of history.” Toynbee argues that the resulting illusions were compounded by the “tendency to over-simplification which the human mind displays in all its activities.”

Toynbee alludes to processes that are shared beyond the West by individuals and groups elsewhere. As a result, realists and liberals alike may erroneously take his explanations to be consistent with their theses of universality. Such an impulse would be mistaken: The particulars of Western oversimplifications take on a special characteristic because of the specificity of the Western ascendancy to hegemony. Once it conquered and colonized the rest of the world, Europe
imposed its ontology of space and time through scientific and ideological institutions and displaced all others. As Mignolo describes the post-Renaissance formulation of thought in Europe, few observers cared then about "how an Indian or a Chinese could understand the far and the alien" much like theorists today pay little attention to "how encounters between Europeans and Chinese or between Europeans and the Amerindians in the sixteenth century" structured our present understanding of the moral order.26 As intimated earlier, nineteenth-century anthropologists and ethnographers followed Enlightenment philosophers in capitalizing on the erasure of the views of the racially distinct, envisaging European civilization and cultures as progress, as an evolutionary phase and an improvement upon the supposedly rigid and unvarying ways of premodern Europeans and their latter-day, non-European "native" prototypes.27

The context of the assumption of the universal applicability of Western ontology was therefore one of reductionism and oversimplification of otherwise plural temporal and spatial conceptions of the human experience. The principal effect of this oversimplification in rationalism and other post-Enlightenment ideologies was the depreciation of the condition of possibility of their core beliefs in justice, freedom, and human rights, on the one hand, and their historical instantiations, on the other. According to E. H. Carr, such oversimplification led to "muddled thinking" about the condition of peace itself.28 Looking at the intellectual traditions that inspired the League of Nations, Carr reprises Toynbee's points in regard to the dangers of egocentrism and oversimplification. In regard to egocentrism, he faults liberals in particular for taking their own institutions as universal good without due regard to their origin, trajectory, and applicability in a pluralist world. Carr imputes to realists another sort of "muddled thinking" that result from oversimplification. This is the realist tendency to take human wickedness as natural law. Such a narrow account of human behavior, he argues, cannot reasonably serve as basis for international morality and a world order.29

The principal effect of Western egocentrism and modern ontology has been a depreciation of the multifold condition of possibility of international morality and the Western-inspired international order, on the one hand, and the very authors who inspire today's international theorists, on the other. In its first instance, this condition comprises both the Greco-Roman propensity to conflicts and wars and the inability of Europe to undergo a peaceful transition from the onset of the Renaissance to modernity. Another facet of this condition is the insistence on a hierarchy of values for a world differentiated on the basis of race. Carr himself falls prey to this tendency when he decries "totalitarianism" only when "the brutalities which, in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were confined to dealings between the civilised and the uncivilised were turned by civilised peoples against one another."30 Although Carr rejects the "Darwinian doctrine" for its identification of "the good of the whole with the good of the fittest" in the context of civilized Europe, he attempts to balance power and morality such as to maintain that the interests and "right of the strongest to assume world leadership" remain central to international morality and the world order. By this formula, he means that Europe and the United States must assume world leadership by right, and that political wisdom dictated that they govern the international system by consensus among them so as not to provoke "a re-crudescence of disintegrating tendencies." His conclusion is that "power cannot be expressed in terms of morality," but his sense is that this maxim need not apply in Europe. The civilized and the uncivilized must not be treated in the same manner.31

White Modernity and Black Dreams

International theorists have consistently looked to moments in the politically chaotic European context of modernity as the proper place to look for useful insights for the future. They do so by exploring the events leading to the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, the American and French revolutions, and World Wars I and II. While the American and French revolutions are said to usher in the modern era and encode its implements in the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, IR theorists look toward Hobbes, John Locke, the Abbé de Saint Pierre, Rousseau, William Jefferson, James Madison, Kant, Wilson, and other Western thinkers on justice, freedom, the causes of war, and the prospect of peace. Yet the vast majority are unable to cast a similarly favorable eye on the Haitian Revolution, which occurred a mere twenty years after the American Revolution and was the first to abolish slavery.

The inability of Western philosophers, theorists, jurists, and other advocates to "theorize" the black experience is one of the most glaring modern phenomena. To be sure, Enlightenment thinkers envisaged pity, generosity, and philanthropy for the enslaved blacks. Yet, their pronouncements on slavery concerned neither exclusively the transatlantic slavery nor black enslavement in the Americas. As Trouillot amply demonstrates,

slavery was at that time an easy metaphor, accessible to a large public who knew that the word stood for a number of evils except perhaps
the evil itself. Slavery in the parlance of the philosophers could be whatever was wrong with European rule in Europe and elsewhere.32

Neither they nor their successors found full and formal philosophical grounds and expressions with which to condemn and redress racial injustice. They wrote volumes about human freedom, but they were reluctant to canonize the Haitian Revolution as one of the three momentous events that augured modernity. Few systematically viewed Haitians and others of the black diaspora as deserving equal moral solicitation and justice.

Today's international theorists have not been kinder to the black world than their politician counterparts. Underneath the radicalism of today's theorists of international society, civil society, and human rights lie disturbing silences, banalizations, and erasures. These lacunas related to non-European groups can be explained partly by the rejection of social theory in favor of analyses of international politics. This distinction is compounded by the canonization of particular historical trajectories and parochial texts as foundations of international reflections. In turn, the process of canonization is complemented by a secular equivalent of the Protestant standpoint on justification whereby the propriety of actions depend upon the prior identity of their subjects. Western identity (now a substitute for God's grace) and Western canons (replacing the scriptures) would absolve self-justified states and their subjects of the burden of accountability in the formulation, advocacy, and global application of self-interested norms. The related universalism is a sort of fundamentalism that does not conform to the exigencies of a diverse world of ideologies, cultures, and religions wherein people's lives differ greatly based on their access (or lack of it) to the material and immaterial resources of the moral order.

In light of the above, historical events at the periphery of Europe have been marginalized as social in character and not politically relevant to international knowledge. Likewise, the rights emerging from decolonization have been cataloged by international theorists as "social rights," a bundle of merely suggestive entitlements, in opposition to the more compulsory "human rights." Indeed, the Haitian and anticolonial revolutions have been tarred politically as insignificant, although, as noted above, the former, coming a mere twenty years after the American War of Independence, was the first to abolish slavery. Toussaint Louverture and his companions first proclaimed the rights currently associated with the dignity of persons living under totalitarian regimes: the right to "not be someone else's property, not being flogged, not being denied a family or the right to testify in court, to not being raped, murdered, or sold."33 Yet, according to Sidney Mintz,
"the Haitian Revolution has no standing (so to speak) in Europe,"34 even as women's rights groups and human rights activists today advocate the same rights for their constituencies and against new tyrants.

There are many explanations for this neglect. One is that much of modern history has been written to celebrate human achievements and to appropriate the human spirit for the West. Originating in the seventeenth century, this localization of "humanity" in Europe authorized the latter to conquer others, to colonize them, and to strip them of land, labor, and dignity. Another is the temptation to banalize black history has led some to stress the "difficulties" of casting "illiterate" black revolutionaries alongside Jefferson and Madison or Dalton and Robespierre, all well-spoken trustees of the human spirit. The result of this "banalization" and other formal methods of erasure, according to Trouillot, is the writing out of history of the Haitian Revolution.35

But the banishment of the Haitian Revolution from the "human story" and "our" "disciplinary archives" is not as innocent as it appears. Despite the admirable efforts of dissenters and insurgents, the discipline of international relations combines traditions of teleological contemplations with self-conscious utilitarianism and strategic thinking. It matters to the participants and professional associations that the disciplinary debates occur in their preferred fashions and according to specific axes. The choice of international events, the constitution of their relevance, and the reasons behind their incorporations into the field also matter to the professional guilds. The same guilds or associations pay attention to the conclusions and implications drawn from the incorporated events and theories. Finally, international theorists maintain notions of loyalty and institute standards to both advance the collective good according to their own interests and to enable the success of their subjects in overtaking all others on favorable competitive terms.

In this light, the banishment of the Haitian Revolution from memory has been consistent with the modern insistence on concealing crimes in order to project moral rectitude, the rule of reason, and historical purpose. It would be hard to recover the memory of the Haitian Revolution fully without acknowledging the crimes of modernity and the emergence elsewhere in the nonwhite world of antecedent or concurrent idioms of freedom. The crimes decried by the Haitian revolutionaries included slavery, encompassing human bondage in a multiplicity of forms. Their envisaged tyrants included the slaveholding American revolutionaries, just a few hours away from their own shores, and their French brethren across the Atlantic Ocean. Likewise, the primary object of anticolonialism was another crime of modernity, colonialism, just as the primary culprits were the European individuals, groups, and nations behind that project. These
revolutions constructed their idioms of freedom in opposition to modernity and the colonial project in order to restore humanity to Africans and the black diaspora: the Maroons, the Aborigines, the Quilombos, and other black enclaves in the Americas and the Pacific Ocean.

The theoretical affirmation of these revolutions would shed a new light on the story of modernity. Likewise, the recognition of anti-modernist but equally liberating idioms would undermine the mystical place accorded to Western revolutions, their institutionalized interpretations, and their political incorporations as justificatory grounds for the hegemonic activities. Indeed, the justification of the mission civilisatrice was the absence of civilizations in the regions of its implementation. The discovery and affirmation of civilizations in such regions would alter the meaning of acts committed in actualizing the mission. The latter would cease to be necessary violence and become crimes committed through policies easily identifiable as thuggery, barbarism, and worse. Practically, such counternarratives would tarnish the image of Western self-assigned mandates of yesteryear to guide others and legislate for international society. Such mandates or moral authority were founded upon the claim that the self-declared trustees were uniquely endowed with the knowledge of rights, liberty, and justice.

The preservation of the European experience and narratives as universal expressions of the human spirit and source of international morality was at stake in the early phases of anticolonialism, after World War II. In France, for instance, Charles de Gaulle explicitly ordered the “whitening” of the French army and national image in a bid to secure his country’s position as a global power and the “natural” leader of the French-speaking world. De Gaulle initiated this process through his inordinate steps to portray his triumphal return to Paris as a French event. Although he could not bar U.S. troops from the spotlight, he did manage to cast aside Africans by ordering the confinement of African troops to barracks away from Paris. He complemented this action later through an official policy of blanchissement (whitening) of the army and the national image. Whether coincidentally or not, French intellectuals have since cleansed their theories of subjectivity, identity, and cultural pluralism of their “genealogical” debts to the empire and the French encounters with the “natives.” As Trouillot indicates, “a perusal of French historical writings reveals multiple layers of silences” on France’s relations to its empire.

Even progressive Western groups, including the vast majority of cosmopolitans and transnationalists, inadvertently partake in the ongoing whitening of history and the human experience by basing their authority in exclusive narratives that naturalize racial inequality. To
be sure, many project a general sense of optimism and exude an ethics of responsibility toward the disadvantaged. Yet just as many have undertaken their humanitarian actions while assuming that natural endowments, immutable cultural dispositions, and distinct regional attributes—all bearing on race—account for the physical, social, and political ills that affect the different groups in need of assistance or solidarity. Consistently, many attribute the spread of poverty, AIDS and other diseases, and social conflicts in Africa to the natural environment (or nature), sexual promiscuity (barely veiled racial innuendo), and political proclivities leaning on dysfunction (political culture).

While there exist complex structural if debated causes to Africa's economic and political ills, there is a simpler dimension to the AIDS epidemic that has escaped scrutiny: the refusal of the Reagan administration to release funds for a program that would have enabled the World Health Organization to launch an early-warning campaign in Africa on the impending pandemic. According to the program director, Dr. Michael Mann, of Johns Hopkins University, the Reagan administration was explicit in indicating that it did not care about "those poor people in Africa." Reagan and his advisers were satisfied that their constituencies felt likewise about Africa and that they were mostly interested that US financial aid did not contribute the dispensing of knowledge about condoms and other contraceptives. AIDS experts generally agree that the exponential leap in the African rate of new HIV transmission can be attributed to the sheer number of the already-infected, thanks in part to a racially insensitive policy. These individuals were largely unaware of the existence of the disease at the time of their infection. Today, hardly anyone dwells on the racial ideology that motivated much of the Reagan administration foreign policy toward Africa. It is easier to appeal to cultural cliché regarding "black sexuality," although the evidence suggests that the level of HIV infections worldwide can be attributed to behavior common to individuals and groups inhabiting all regions.

Come to "Africa":
A Vindication of the Colonial Project

As indicated earlier, the distinctions between civilized and uncivilized, liberals and totalitarians, tolerance and fundamentalism, and the like retain an appeal in IR theory for the purpose of justifying the foreign policy of hegemonic powers elsewhere. As indicated earlier, liberals generally hold the West to be intentionally and teleologically moderate and tolerant across time and space, despite the violent context of European ascent to hegemony and the corrosive effects of modernity
and capitalism on Western notions of community, human solidarity, and the collective good. With varying degrees, international theorists hold up “natives” as languishing in a prototypical, albeit natural, state of peace and war in order to maintain a general amnesia about the modern degenerative condition of hierarchy, violence, and the delusion of hegemony. In contrast, realists presently hold regional clusters of communities as a model of dysfunction, barbarism, totalitarianism, and intolerance by attributing to them uniform traditions and unchanging customs. Their differences notwithstanding, both groups insist on this modern ontology—the purpose being to justify a certain status quo, international morality, and the admissibility of violence.

Combining these two perspectives, Hedley Bull likens the possibility of international society in an anarchical modern world to the “ordered anarchy” that exists within and among “primitive stateless societies.” These twentieth-century primitives exist principally in Africa, New Guinea, and Australia, among black folks. The African primitives, he suggests, are the Nuer, Dinka, and Mandari of Sudan; Bwamba and Lugbara of Uganda; and Konkomba of Togoland, among others. Bull is interested that these societies exhibit order through rules and order-maintaining functions of “communicating, administering, interpreting, enforcing, legitimising, adapting, and ‘protecting’ them.” He also admires that, in these primitive societies, “the politically competent groups may use force in defence of their rights, while individuals and groups other than these must look to the privileged, politically competent groups for protection, rather than resort to force themselves.” In one masterstroke, Bull manages to pay a compliment to the primitives, to vindicate their past and future conquest by the “politically competent” West, and to deligitimize the resistance of the primitive to the colonial project.

It is not uncommon presently to find the justifications of all manners of policies in allusions to the supposed endowment of the “races” and received ideas on self and others. In a New York Times column on January 28, 1996, Thomas Friedman invited the 1994 freshman Republican congressional class to “come to Africa” to see first hand what he claimed was a metaphor for the brutal competition advocated by the 1994 freshman Republican class in Congress: “They might want to come to Africa and glimpse at what happens to countries where there is no sense of community, no sense that people owe their government anything, no sense that anyone is responsible for anyone else, and where everyone, rich or poor, is left to the tender mercies of the global marketplace.” Friedman secures his authority on his claims to a privileged knowledge of international affairs. He is also attuned to the authoritative discourse and scholarly works in Africa. One of his contemporaries, Robert Kaplan, first popularized the thesis that
“Africa” and “African states” stand in for “The Coming Anarchy” or “the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war.”

It would be easy to dismiss Friedman and Kaplan by claiming that journalists belong to a different craft and, as a result, perform a different role in society than do scholars, politicians, and activists. Indeed, the former aspire to observe unfolding international events and their participants. Their main protagonists are politicians, with whom they often maintain close “contact.” As a result of this proximity to policymakers, journalists (along with political activists) have had greater impact on policy than academics. Journalists also serve as barometer of the collective and larger societal understanding of the causes, motivations, and consequences of international existence, transcommunal engagements, and foreign policy. Indeed, they are sustained by the same sources as scholars and producers of international knowledge. Collectively, they draw on similar interpretations of international events and similar institutionalizations of history and memory.

Journalists have frequently anticipated others in cleansing their shared Africa-related archives of the historicity of “late-modern African existence” in a favor of the naturalization of global context and local historical processes as attributes of race and region—transmuted into cultural traditions, political environments, and social ecology. They have therefore foreshadowed scholarly speculations on the causes and implications of historical events. Specifically, Kaplan’s essay augured the general themes of scholarly works on the state of the African state: “quasi-states,” “failed states,” “collapsed states,” “predatory states,” and so on. Even the titles of recent books on Africa suggest the peculiarity of African politics: The Politics of the Belly and Personal Rule in Black Africa, among others. These scholarly works and chronopolitical narratives have helped to link African politics and the state of the state to the “intrinsic nature” of endogenous “cultures” and local institutions. Specifically, they have centered on particular but selectively chosen details of everyday politics that naturalize as culture all forms of politics, including the regional manifestations of global processes and local responses to such historical processes. They have undervalued the ethical standards and policy choices of participant agents, on the one hand, and the structuring effects of their self-perceptions and moral dispositions for the international system, on the other.

Africanists who discount the global contexts of African politics frequently downplay the global context of African politics, particularly the external policies and global structures against which Africa
must develop its reactions to the moral order—formulate political independence, sovereign right, and the privilege of self-determination. They project an image of Africans as uniform and undifferentiated collectives whose psychologies, wills, and desires are constitutionally retrograde, deficient, or wanting. These presumed features have served to dismiss the view that Western interventions may have negative consequences on Africa. For instance, Naomi Chazan et al. effectively reject the main conclusions of many comparative studies on the transatlantic slave trade by insisting that “it is always impossible to judge how serious this effect was in that there is little evidence on the extent of the disruption, and, of course, we have no idea of whether similar disruption would have occurred in the absence of the Atlantic slave trade.”

Africa, we are thus encouraged to conclude, is prone to annihilation, and this fact absolves the participants and eradicates the consequences of the slave trade, conquest, and colonialism.

This slight has persisted whether analysts contrast the African condition with that of the developed world or those of other underdeveloped regions. The refrain frequently heard in opposing the “strides” made by Asian countries to the condition of African states is that both regions were colonies and many of the countries attained decolonization at the same time. Such assertions are made without due regard to the operations of colonial governance; the degrees of disruption of regional networks and social relations; and the effects of regional nodes of modernity on local economies. Significantly, such statements do not account for the configuration and dynamics of power and economic relations during the Cold War and their added effects on postcolonial differentiations among the regions of the globe.

Liberal theorists, whether institutionalists or functionalists, and their critics have only occasionally and as an afterthought applied themselves to apprehending their objects in Africa—peace, justice, conflict, and war—from the perspectives of the self-understanding of its inhabitants, their psychologies, desire, and wills. In general, they enunciate “African political cultures” so as to conflate them with the proclivities of remorseless African tyrants and the tragic social conflicts arising from the mismanagement of African economies by corrupt elites. The subtext of their opinions amounts to a lack of faith in the capacity of Africans to generate and maintain viable social orders. Many cannot fathom the possibility that African entities—including the famished multitudes, political prisoners, or exiled intellectuals—may indeed envision a moral order that obtains political freedom and justice, distinct from Western-inspired institutional framework.

Finally, theorists who have relied on their declared subjective attitudes toward Africa have varied in their emphasis of the dimensions
of social inquiry—that is, the moral, ethical, teleological, ideological, and cultural elements. Some have shown no interest in comparative inquiry or the historicity of the material or objective elements of African politics. They have chosen to extrapolate from their perceived dysfunctions or pathologies of African politics as means to reaffirming their own self-understanding. Like Keith B. Richburg, many have used their own self-understanding and aesthetic inclinations as substitutes for comparative interpretations.\(^5^2\)

* * *

Together the end of the Cold War and the information age have spun new hope for an international society of democratic entities founded upon the respect of human rights. The underlying optimism for a triumph of liberalism rivals similar sentiments during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which culminated in the American and French revolutions, and twentieth-century hopes for a peaceful League of Nations. There are other, less-flattering similarities between the present era and the past. The most glaring continues to be the inability of Western philosophers, theorists, jurists, and other advocates of revolutionary changes to “theorize” the Haitian Revolution or to envisage the black diaspora as deserving equal moral solicitation and justice. Even after the two world wars, the men who brokered postwar settlements could not transcend race in their application of justice, solidarity, and equality. On both occasions, Western leaders compensated the European victims of the German state, including German minorities and their descendants who were subjected to expropriation and crimes against their persons. Concurrently, the peacemakers traded off German colonies to other colonial powers. These transfers were ostensibly conceived as trusts, but in practice the mandatory powers expected to find material utilities in managing them. This situation led to political and ideological confusion about the purpose of the world order: whether it was intended to bring about freedom to all or to underwrite Western conquest, domination, and enslavement of the rest.

Postwar outcomes also led to intellectual confusion about the nature of the international order and the positions of various regions within it. For instance, theorists have claimed that decolonization led to “negative sovereignty” rather than the “positive sovereignty” that obtains in the West.\(^5^3\) Yet few have inquired into the cause of the absence in Africa of the wherewithal to provide the goods associated with positive sovereignty. Instead, they have explained away the refusal of Western powers to either implement postcolonial justice or consider the legitimacy of related arguments in their collective deliberations. Robert Jackson in particular holds that postcolonial international morality envisaged positive liberties and an international “affirmative action”
that were inconsistent with the ethos of negative individual rights and liberties that prevail in the West.\textsuperscript{54}

Such views are mistaken. In fact, postwar Western leaders and entities possessed the knowledge, traditions, languages, and expressions of rights and justice suited to postcoloniality. They simply could not articulate the impositions on the peoples subjected to US, British, and French colonialism as injustice. As a result, the humanity of the European victims of Germany could be asserted, but not that of those "who owed their allegiance to the British crown as colonial subjects." Not even the Algerians murdered on V-Day (May 8, 1945) in Setif by their former World War II French trenchmates could be considered victims. They were after all "natives" who inhabited "colonial territories." Who, after all, would make a constitutional or jurisprudential case of the plight of "natives" who merely inhabited colonial territories? Earlier decisions by the International Court of Justice affirmed the notion that European powers were entitled to trade colonial lands without the consent of their inhabitants.\textsuperscript{55} Today, half a century after the Holocaust, Western powers rightly pursue European banks and other beneficiary institutions for the crimes against Jews for restitution of property. The same powers compelled Namibian and South African blacks in the 1980s to give up their legal rights to adjudication and their claims to property as the condition for freedom from white minority rule. In some cases, the concerned individuals held deeds to lands taken from them a mere twenty years before the settlements leading to independence.\textsuperscript{56}

The discipline of international relations has failed to encode these events formally, shelving them either as anomalies or as necessary evils during troubled colonial and Cold War eras. The temporality of the birth of the discipline has had consequences for its approach to race and culture. The discipline effectively joined the ranks of institutions that spoke for the universal moral order and thus began to maintain the universality of European canons and traditions as well as take their own positions as the reference point from which to evaluate all other cultures. This is not to say that the authoritative international knowledge produced in the dominant Western academies has scant bearing on its objects; it is to suggest that, from its inception, the field exhibited a substantive paradox, an aspiration to universalism from the standpoint of a particular subject, the West, to the exclusion of the rest. Afterwards, international theorists fitted non-Europeans, particularly the racially distinct who exhibited "incomprehensible" cultures and religions and cultures, with recessive, particularistic, and non-universalizing attributes. Thus, few international theorists have concerned themselves with the views of their ethnographic objects. They have been unable to imagined the formerly colonized, particularly of the black diaspora, as possessing autonomous
bodies of knowledge. Instead, many have erroneously extrapolated banalities and platitudes from the anthropologists and professional ethnographers and then generalized these as accounts of culture and traditions. It is not an accident, therefore, that international theorists generally do not deduce the positions of the postcolonial states and entities from the latter's self-postulated interest, desire, and knowledge. Instead, analysts are fond of identifying such positions by proximity, associations, and alliances. Hence, they base their assumptions on the direction and essential values of Lesotho mostly on its proximity to South Africa; Ivory Coast on the amity between Felix Houphouët-Boigny and the French establishment; and Patrice Lumumba's Congo on its acceptance of aid from Nkrumah's Ghana. Likewise, many theorists can imagine only select modes of engagement of postcolonial entities: assimilation, detachment, distance, and obliteration among them. It is clear from such derivations that neither Western policymakers nor their ideologues in the academy allow room for discernment by postcolonial entities. Just as the West could not accept the legitimacy of the nonaligned movement during the Cold War, the like of Henry Kissinger and Jean Kirkpatrick could not fathom homegrown progressive movements in Angola, Mozambique, and elsewhere in Africa.

I will conclude by insisting once again on the existence of many kinds of discernment and deliberative processes in the West that do not conform to a hermeneutics of race or a racialization of knowledge and politics. As I mentioned in the beginning, the body of IR theorists does have its souls or consciences. My goal has been to highlight a generalized process, not to indict all analyses and analysts. Secondly, governments around the world have begun to adopt policies intended to reverse the effects of past policies and policy formulations that are embedded in "colonialism." For instance, Canada, Australia, Brazil, and Colombia have attempted, through constitutional means, to restore historic rights to their non-white populations, consistent with their present needs and outside of prior formal interpretations of their juridical standing. It is a hopeful sign and a fitting conclusion that such challenges are recognized and that attempts are made to meet the needs of the unjustly dispossessed. These events would hopefully compel the IR discipline to recognize the pathologies embedded in the reflections and deliberations that inform its current narratives and accounts.

Notes


7. Jackson, note 5.


11. Ibid., pp. 74–99.

12. Ibid., p. 80.

13. Ibid., p. 95.


15. Ibid., p. 187.


18. This determination to justify imperialism and to erase judgment on the related methods was clumsy and full of signs of consternation.


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 38.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 224.

31. Ibid., pp. 224–239.

32. Trouillot, note 10, p. 85.


34. Ibid.

35. Trouillot, note 10, p. 96.
38. Trouillot, note 10, p. 100.
39. It has been reported that, during his first successful campaign for governor of the state of California, Ronald Reagan quipped about African leaders as cannibals, saying that "when those leaders have you for lunch, they really do have you for lunch." National Public Radio, *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*, July 8, 2001.
41. Ibid., p. 60.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 62.
51. Kaplan, note 46.
54. Ibid., pp. 26–31, and throughout.