Review of International Studies (2022), **48**: 5, 787–800
doi:10.1017/S0260210522000389

RIS

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Introduction to the Special Issue: Pluriversal relationality

Tamara Trownsell[1], Navnita Chadha Behera[2*] and Giorgio Shani[3]

[1]Estudios Internacionales, Universidad del Azuay, Cuenca, Azuay, Ecuador, [2]Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India and [3]Politics and International Studies, International Christian University, Mitaka, Japan
*Corresponding author. Email: navnita@iriis.in

(Received 11 May 2022; revised 2 August 2022; accepted 23 August 2022; first published online 29 September 2022)

Introduction

Both relationality and separateness are aspects of our everyday lives. How we engage these phenomena hinges on the particular existential assumptions that we take for granted. Within the discipline of International Relations (IR), both relationality and separateness have informed how global politics is studied and practiced. How states and their relations are conceived has, for instance, varied by the distinct degrees of privilege given to separation and interconnection: from notions of completely autonomous units like billiard balls to always emergent phenomena co-constituted through relations. The plurality of trajectories that inform this Special Issue illustrate how much broader the spectrum of relational engagement can be when we are cognisant of the impact of these existential assumptions on forms of life, knowing, and knowledge production in International Relations. By highlighting a spectrum of relational engagement, we raise important questions about the way the various knowledge frames in IR are acknowledged, legitimised, limited, and reproduced.

Specifically, this Special Issue[1] asks two different sets of questions: (1) How do different cosmological traditions in the Americas, Asia, and Australia view and practice relationality; and (2) what explains the disconnect between their lived realities and the foundational knowledge categories of IR. The epistemological plurality highlighted in the issue affords us an opportunity to expand, enrich, and enlarge the debate on relationality in IR by making it 'pluriversal'. 'Pluriversal relationality' as understood in the Special Issue advocates for learning to become *ontologically* plural. This would allow us to understand world politics as ontologically multiple, characterised by the entanglement of different cosmologies, each with different understandings of the relationship among all living beings including humans and the cosmos. It calls attention to the constant encounters of multiple worlds as distinct from those being made by the modern 'one-world world'[2] by recognising that these are shaped by different cosmological traditions that are simultaneously forged through collective co-creations that emerge and are constituted differently due to the configurational variations and effects of shared time-space, language, values, and so on.

This introduction consists of four parts. The first contextualises the 'relational turn' in IR against the larger backdrop of debates on non/post-Western arguments and global IR.[3] The

[1]The Special Issue arose as a result of deliberations between specialists in different cosmological traditions who first met in January 2016 at a workshop called 'Alternative Cosmologies and Knowledge Systems in IR' in New Delhi, India and later at a workshop on 'Doing IR Differently', in Galapagos, Ecuador in July 2018.

[2]John Law, 'What's wrong with a one-world world?', *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 16:1 (2015), pp. 126–39.

[3]Space does not allow us to elaborate on the differences between these approaches. See *inter alia* Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, 'Why is there no non-Western International Relations theory? An introduction', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7:3 (2007); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and*

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the British International Studies Association.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

second part introduces the concept of pluriversal relationality as a point of departure for engaging with the articles in the Special Issue. Its ramifications for IR are discussed in the third part that explores what forging a pluriversal IR might entail and briefly lays out different/alternate lines of inquiry in this pursuit. The final section outlines the structure of the Special Issue before concluding.

The disciplinary contours of IR in the past quarter century have been shaped by two broad sets of developments with abiding implications for its theories, concepts, and methods. The first underlines the larger move away from 'substantialism', towards 'relationalism' in the social sciences. The second decentres the West within the discipline, including a critical interrogation of its Eurocentric practices and knowledge structures,[4] and the move towards a decolonial, global, or post-Western IR. As a social science, IR is based on foundational assumptions deriving from a substantialist mode of scientific inquiry. Substantialism refers to the 'notion that it is substances of some kind (thing, being, essence) that constitute the fundamental units of all analysis.'[5] Relationalism, by contrast, focuses on 'dynamic unfolding relations, rejecting the reification of units that arises from substantialist analyses'.[6] Favouring what Dewey and Bentley labelled as 'trans-actional' perspective, it categorically rejects the notion that 'one can posit discrete, pre-given units such as the individual or society as starting points of … analysis.'[7] Similarly, it rejects structuralist analyses which imbue structures with 'essences' capable of acting as agents focusing instead on how 'configuration of ties'[8] between social actors 'construct and reproduce social constellations, institutions and fabrics'.[9] Social actors and structures cannot be assumed but are mutually constituted through relations and cannot be considered as ontologically distinct from the relations in which they are embedded.

Although the majority of IR theories continue to be substantialist, IR has undergone a 'relational turn'[10] with the emergence of stronger versions of constructivist, feminist, poststructuralist, new materialist, and decolonial approaches. These approaches argue that international relations are not comprised of relations between self-contained units but are constituted by relations which precede them.[11] The various contributions to this Special Issue both seek to engage with these

Evolution of IR at its Centenary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Navnita Chadha Behera, 'Re-imagining IR in India', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7:3 (2007), pp. 341–68; Giorgio Shani, 'Toward a post-Western IR: The "Umma," "Khalsa Panth", and critical International Relations theory', *International Studies Review*, 10:4 (December 2008), pp. 722–34; and Robbie Shilliam (ed.), *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011).

[4]See Special Issue on 'Race and imperialism in International Relations: Theories and practice', *International Affairs*, 98:1 (January 2022); See also Navnita Chadha Behera, 'One world, many worlds: Globalization, de-globalization and knowledge production', *International Affairs*, 97:5 (2021), pp. 1579–97, available at: {doi 10.1093/ia/iiab119}.

[5]Mustafa Emirbayer, 'Manifesto for a relational sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 103:2 (1997), pp. 281–317 (p. 282).

[6]Ibid., p. 281.

[7]Ibid., p. 287.

[8]Patrick T. Jackson and Dan Nexon, 'Relations before states: Substance, process, and the study of world politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:3 (1999), pp. 291–332 (p. 293).

[9]Martin Weber, 'The normative grammar of relational analysis: Recognition theory's contribution to understanding shortcomings in IR's relational turn', *International Studies Quarterly* (2020), p. 2, available at: {doi: 10.1093/isq/sqaa036}.

[10]For a succinct recent summary of the 'relational turn' highlighting both Anglophone and Sinophone scholarship in IR, see Astrid H. M. Nordin, Graham M. Smith, Raoul Bunskoek, Chiung-chiu Huang, Yih-jye (Jay) Hwang, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Emilian Kavalski, L. H. M. Ling (posthumously), Leigh Martindale, Mari Nakamura, Daniel Nexon, Laura Premack, Yaqing Qin, Chih-yu Shih, David Tyfield, Emma Williams, and Marysia Zalewski, 'Towards global relational theorizing: A dialogue between Sinophone and Anglophone scholarship on relationalism', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32:5 (2019), pp. 570–81.

[11]For an account of this position within the constructivist tradition, see Jackson and Nexon, 'Relations before states'. In the feminist tradition, see Maria Stern and Marysia Zalewski, 'Feminist fatigue(s): Reflections on feminism and familiar fables of militarisation', *Review of International Studies*, 35:3 (2009), pp. 611–30. For a seminal account, which has influenced the development of actor-network theory in post-structuralist IR, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

theories to further broaden the discipline and more explicitly interrogate the Eurocentric assumptions upon which most theories of IR are based.[12]

In recent years, the assumptions of IR have been 'provincialised'[13] by postcolonial[14] and decolonial[15] approaches that highlight that most IR theories, including critical approaches, continue to be grounded on ontological and epistemological assumptions derived from Western philosophical and historical traditions since 'both physically and ideationally, the tenets of the European enlightenment' remain the main resource of 'its master narrative, thus circumscribing its imagination, understandings and knowledge'.[16] This constitutes the second main challenge to the 'substantialist' IR. Although this critique may not apply to some relational approaches within IR, many do not explicitly engage with relational traditions or 'cosmologies'[17] outside of the West (with the notable exception of those that engage with Chinese relational thinking).[18] This Special Issue seeks to contribute to the 'relation turn' in IR by pluralising the different sources of relational thinking in IR and engaging with different relational traditions in the Americas, Asia and Australia. Collectively these relational traditions conceive of *relationality* differently and constitute a *pluriverse* of entangled universes rather than a single 'universe'.[19]

Pluriversal relationality

The idea of pluriversal relationality employed in the Special Issue marks a point of departure from the existing conceptions of relationality in the discipline of IR in three fundamental ways. First, we posit relationality as ways of practicing existence, thus relational approaches unravel the divisions between 'being-knowing-doing'. Second, pluriversal relationality is multidimensional in that it sees humans, non-humans, and the cosmos in relational frames. Third, it is intrinsically plural with multitudinal expressions grounded in diverse cosmological traditions.

We engage the idea of relationality primarily at a meta-theoretical level and address its metaphysical understandings that condition our thinking and the borders of imaginable possibilities. We start with the ontological register of existence, or the filter that results from the fundamental assumptions that we embrace and enact. This register is well and 'always-already' underway in

to Actor-Network Theory (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005). Finally, for a decolonial approach of relationality, see Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[12]John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760– 2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[13]Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[14]For an introduction to postcolonial approaches to IR, see the various contributions to Sanjay Seth (ed.), *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A Critical Introduction* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

[15]See David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, 'Worlding, ontological politics and the possibility of a decolonial IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 45:3 (2017), pp. 293–311.

[16]Navnita Chadha Behera, Kristina Hinds, and Arlene B. Tickner, 'Making amends: Towards an anti-racist critical security studies in IR', *Security Dialogue*, 52:S (2021). See also Behera, 'One world, many worlds'; Giorgio Shani, 'Provincialising critical theory: Islam, Sikhism and International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20:3 (2007), pp. 417–34; John M. Hobson and Alina Sajed, 'Navigating beyond the Eurofetishist frontier of critical IR theory', *International Studies Review*, 19:4 (2017), pp. 547–72; and Hartmut Behr and Giorgio Shani, 'Rethinking emancipation in a critical IR: Normativity, cosmology, and pluriversal dialogue', *Millennium*, 49:2 (January 2021), pp. 368–91.

[17]Cosmologies refer to sets of culturally specific ontological and epistemological propositions about the origins and the evolution of the cosmos and our position in it. See Milja Kurki and Georgio Shani and Navnita Chadha Behera (this Special Issue). Also Milja Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020) and Behr and Shani, 'Rethinking emancipation in a critical IR'.

[18] See Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Emilian Kavalski, *The Guanxi of Relational International Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge 2018); and Nordin et al., 'Towards global relational theorizing'.

[19]See Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena, 'Introduction: Pluriverse', in *A World of Many Worlds*, ed. Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 1–23 and Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shaping our sense of existence, before we get around to any kind of explicit theorisation or production of social knowledge.

Referring to how different ontological assumptions produce 'distinctive philosoph[ies] of nature', Jarrad Reddekop in this Special Issue cites Heidegger's explanation of philosophical process as 'mathematical' in that *mathesis* signifies a prior delineation of what is learnable about things. We argue that the ontological register of separation, interconnection, or any other such existential commitments that are embraced in this first moment are generative of very different understandings of *what* we see/encounter and *how* we encounter, filter, interpret, and act on existence. This is important since the basic formulation of ontology commonly applied in IR is derived from an ontological register that 'treats separation as the fundamental condition of existence, while rendering interconnection secondary or largely derivative' (see Tamara Trownsell, this Special Issue). As such, even intersubjectively conceptualised phenomena (for example, individuals, communities and states) still rely on other reified divisions (for example, humans v. nature/environment).

A deeper understanding of relationality draws attention to 'a moment *prior to* the formal conceptualisation of ontology in which assumptions are made about the conditions of existence that subsequently inform our explicit ontological premises' (see Trownsell). We argue that any such taken-for-granted, foundational assumptions about units and their traits continually shape at the most fundamental level how we participate in existence, how we cumulatively co-create and 'world' our worlds.

In the most basic terms, many thinkers in IR begin with either 'separation' or 'interconnection' as fundamental assumptions/commitments about the nature of existence; each stands for potentially distinctive ways of making (and making sense of) the world. It is important to note, however, that this distinction is not absolute (see Chih-yu Shih, this Special Issue), and that other kinds and grades of existential commitments may exist, forming a continuum with many shades, levels, and degrees of separation and interconnection figuring in between.

An ontological assumption of separation is predicated on an understanding of existence in which 'entities are primarily encountered as stable, isolable, relatively fixed and bounded, self-subsisting substances with properties' (see Reddekop). Drawn from Newtonian cosmology that conceives of reality as primarily constituted by atoms (units) wherein all entities are deemed to have 'singular 'essences' that exist on their own',[20] it accords primacy to the existential autonomy of entities and any relations between these are considered to be posterior to that initial existential engagement. The separation-based ontological register, understood and termed as an 'atomistic ontology' in the Special Issue,[21] has become the dominant way to approach reality and construct 'objects of study' in IR. Starting with an existential assumption of interconnection, on the other hand, understands any identified entity 'to be constituted or emergent *through* relations that are prior and dynamic. That is, complex and multiple linkages of between-ness precede (and can continually change) the 'whatness' of any given point/entity' (see Reddekop).

The Special Issue: An overview

The various authors showcased in this Special Issue engage the relational lifeways of distinct cosmological traditions to explore the implications of interconnection-based existential commitments for how IR is studied. In some relational frameworks of existence, for instance, there are no separate domains of knowledge of and about the world apart from our own acts that make that world; nor are there any categorical distinctions between knowing, being and becoming. Shih, in his contribution, suggests we learn from Confucianism's reliance on improvisation of roles 'aimed

[20]See Milja Kurki and Amaya Querejazu in this Special Issue. Also see Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe*.

[21]See Kurki, Jarrad Reddekop, and Querejazu in this Special Issue.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

at controlling mutual threat/estrangement' between the self and the other, always 'according to the bilateral trafficking' and necessarily doing away with both value and institutional guidance. In the same vein, Amaya Querejazu in her contribution explains that 'the experiences of being, knowing and doing, are more than ontology, epistemology, and methodology, not only because they are interconnected but because they concur as unfolding relations: doing *while* feeling *while* knowing *while* being.' Such simultaneity is bodily experienced and becomes a way of going about the world as everyday life.' In the relational cosmology of *dharma*, Giorgio Shani and Navnita Chadha Behera explain the concept of *karma* (action) in that 'every act, including thought – for thought is also an act, leaves its corresponding trace in one's self and in those to whom that act is directed. They make one what one is, and one is constantly in the making', as one's relationships evolve.[22] The real import of relational cosmologies, therefore, does not lie only in expanding the horizons of how we 'know' our world but in exploring alternate existential possibilities of how we live that testify to and reflect its multidimensional character.

Though different cosmological traditions express this idea in multitudinous ways, these are often predicated on a shared understanding that humans and other-than-human-worlds (natural, animal, and spiritual) are deeply interconnected to one another. The Kichwa word *ayllu*, for example, refers to an extended community of relatives that encompasses not only other humans but the local land, waters, and species in Andean and Amazonian worlds (see Reddekop).

One formulation of this position is that relational ontologies invite different kinds of relationships with the non-human, thereby constituting human selves and communities differently.[23] Reddekop in his contribution explains that unlike the typical Western formulations of human exceptionalism, Amazonian Kichwa thinking assumes that plants and animals 'have the full complexity we recognise in ourselves'. Our ability to fully perceive this is muted by the 'relational barriers' of species difference. From this vantage point, the earth and all its non-human beings are not mute resources at the disposal of humans. Instead, living well means cultivating respectful and reciprocal relationships across these 'boundaries of difference with other species', through which humans 'develop bonds of rootedness' by adaptively *becoming like* the land and learning from it.[24]

Relational cosmologies, furthermore, accord with the worldviews of the majority of humankind. Across the globe, cosmologies such as *dharma, din, dao, advaita*, *Sikhi*, Buddhism, *Ubuntu*, Confucianism's Tianxia, along with the cosmovisions of *ayllu* and *runa* among other aboriginal and indigenous communities all foreground the interconnected and relational nature of all kinds of beings and things.[25] Indeed, billions of people across the world practice existence based on deeply relational assumptions. Several contributors to this issue explain the relational frames of some of these cosmologies. Consider Confucianism's celebration that all human beings are related to one another, not because they have the same blood, but because their harmonious coexistence exemplifies the varieties of living nurtured by heaven and the earth.[26] Dharmic cosmology illustrates how all beings are related to one another and have no intrinsic separate

[22]Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Dharma, India and The World Order*, cited in Shani and Behera in this Special Issue.

[23]This resonates with ecologically oriented posthumanist and other relational explorations in IR. See Reddekop in this Special Issue. See also Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, 'Complexity, ecologism, and posthuman politics', *Review of International Studies*, 39 (2013), pp. 663–4; Kurki, *International Relations in a Relational Universe*, pp. 133–4.

[24]Tod D. Swanson and Jarrad Reddekop, 'Looking like the land: Beauty and aesthetics in Amazonian Quichua philosophy and practice', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 85:3 (September 2017), pp. 682–708.

[25]See Tamara A. Trownsell, Arlene B. Tickner, Amaya Querejazu, Jarrad Reddekop, Giorgio Shani, Kosuke Shimizu, Navnita Chadha Behera, and Anahita Arian, 'Differing about difference: Relational IR from around the world', *International Studies Perspectives*, 22:1 (February 2021), pp. 25–64. See also Tamara A. Trownsell, Amaya Querejazu, Giorgio Shani, Navnita Chadha Behera, Jarrad Reddekop, and Arlene B. Tickner, 'Recrafting International Relations through relationality', *E-International Relations* (January 2019), available at: {https://www.e-ir.info/2019/01/08/recrafting-international-relations-through-relationality/}.

[26]See Chih-yu Shih in this Special Issue. For further discussion on Tianxia as a pluriverse, see Chih-yu Shih, 'Bound to relate: Retheorizing international order through Chinese culture of power', in Huiyun Feng and Kai He (eds), *China's*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

existence by themselves and are a part of an indivisible whole – a cosmological order that is governed by a cyclical and heterogenous understanding of time (see Shani and Behera, this Special Issue). The idea of time being 'cyclical' also resonates with Andean communities, wherein 'everything is interrelated by dual and complementary forces that make up a "corresponding world": how it is inside is outside, how it is up is down and, how the past is the future' (see Querejazu, this Special Issue).

The idea of pluriversality, discussed above, grows from these ontological commitments. Pluriversality recognises the multiple, and relational, nature of non-Western cosmologies and recovers and explores 'other' ways of relating to the subjects/objects of IR.[27] This perspective allows us to think through 'the possibilities of relational cohabitation across humans and non-humans and also to recognise the violence done on knowledge and life by non-relational understandings of the world' (see Querejazu). The *normative* conundrum this raises is addressed by Morgan Brigg, Mary Graham, and Martin Weber in their contribution, who show that Australian Aboriginal political theory was worked out 'to *contain*, manage and address the potentially destructive corollaries' of a European vision they term 'survivalism', which belongs nevertheless to 'being-and-becoming' human. They argue that this is not only 'about getting a cognitive grip on destructive violence; it is about addressing it institutionally/politically, including through maintaining an 'international polycentric political system'.

While advancing the idea of pluriversal relationality, most authors in this Special Issue understand and lay out the risks in capturing the idea of relational ways of knowing and being as a '*concept*' and caution against equating 'relations' with 'relationality' lest it becomes another abstract 'object of study' in IR or one that leads to translation of their being into a fixed meaning, reifying these as things or essences. 'Relations relating cannot be captured as concepts without acting against their very nature' (see Trownsell). Milja Kurki highlights this as an important point of departure about the 'new generation of relational thought in IR' in that it is 'much less committed to 'fixing' what a relational perspective entails, in favour of encouraging manifold situated relational knowledges and conversations between different forms of relational thought and practice from different parts of the world and across disciplinary experiences' (see Kurki, this Special Issue). Brigg, Graham, and Weber also find the term relationality problematic partly because it detracts from its inherently plural character and partly because it runs the risk of 'stepping into the "snares of an all too familiar Western metaphysics". So, they defer to the language of "relations, the relation*al* and relationalism rather than relational*ity*" to avoid their "ontologising move" leading to understanding relations as a condition' (see Brigg, Graham and Weber, this Special Issue).

Several authors in the Special Issue further suggest ways to avoid such pitfalls. Trownsell advocates 'recrafting ontology' since the problem, she argues, lies in that robustly relational ways of 'doing-being-feeling-knowing-doing'[28] do not even figure on the ontological register of ontology itself, which is why 'they are continually interpreted as objects of study through the predominant register of separation.' So, expanding the ontological registers to include the legitimate possibility of embracing interconnection alongside separation is the first step towards developing 'ontological agility', that is, knowing how and when to use distinct registers in the exercise of ontological translation. Querejazu presents *cosmopraxis* as a 'methodological' tool that provides 'an alternative to bypass the problem of reifying relationality and fixing the meaning of relations.' She argues in favour of shifting the gaze from the 'ontology of presence that seeks to capture the being' towards 'ontologies of transience' where 'all is passing, living, becoming and in a

Challenges and International Order Transition: Beyond the 'Thucydides Trap' (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), pp. 182–201.

[27]Amaya Querejazu, 'Encountering the pluriverse: Looking for alternatives in other worlds', *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 59:2 (2016).

[28]Arlene B. Tickner and Amaya Querejazu, 'Weaving worlds: Cosmopraxis as relational sensibility', *International Studies Review*, 23:2 (June 2021), pp. 391–408.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ceaseless cyclical transformation, and develop practices of relating to become with them and understand deep relations from within and along.' Understood as such, relational frames offer disruptive and alternative paths to do IR differently by highlighting the importance of cultivating varied ways of relating, co-existing, and collaborating.

Forging a pluriversal IR?

What implications does introducing pluriversal relationality have for IR in terms of forging a pluriversal IR? A pluriversal IR holds the promise of recognising the coexistence of diverse ontological or cosmological traditions and their interactions and of paving the way for political negotiations that allow other realities to exist on their own terms.[29] This, we argue, is not possible without throwing open the question of ontological commitments in IR and the wider social knowledge domain. In doing so, the Special Issue invites fresh conversations about the whole gamut of *gospels* – the meta theoretical edifice and metaphysics that have hitherto shaped the foundational building blocs of its knowledge structures and practices. While much has been written about the enduring impact of Euro-centredness of IR's disciplinary knowledge in limiting its political imaginaries, the Special Issue makes a case for the IR scholars to ask once again some basic albeit fundamental questions such as:

- What are our modes of knowing – reason/ logic/ sensory perceptions/ consciousness/ and energetic ways of knowing?
- Who knows or, who *can* know – some humans based on their race, gender, class, and so on/ all humans/ non-humans?
- How do we understand time – as a singular, linear *chronos*/ a cyclical phenomenon/ both and more?
- Where do we locate ourselves – a 'one-world' world/ multiple worlds/ a cosmos?
- How do we understand difference – as a puzzle or a problem to be managed/resolved/ eliminated or, as a necessary ingredient of existence?

A self-reflexive scrutiny of these questions and the specificities of their characterisation shows that certain possibilities in response to each of these questions have been excluded, debunked, erased, or rendered invisible over time while other answers have become commonsensical by being consonant with prevalent shared meaning systems and use. This explains why it is important to re-examine the foundational assumptions of IR. We suggest the following trajectories or lines of inquiry.

Uncovering IR's silenced pasts: Ontological, cosmological and historical

First we call for pluralising the bases of our fundamental existential commitments and ontological assumptions that provide a different vantage point for interrogating the 'violent and exploitative historical relationships between the East and the West, the South and the North, the Orient and the Occident that has long been erased' in IR.[30] In this respect, we support the decolonial agenda of undoing the lasting effects of the 'colonial matrix of power'.[31] We argue that IR's disciplinary inquiries have thus far mostly precluded acknowledging many possible and equally legitimate existential possibilities that emanate from the relational lifeworlds of diverse living cultures across

[29]See David L. Blaney and Tamara A. Trownsell, 'Recrafting international relations by worlding multiply', *Uluslararas Iliskiler*, 18:70 (2021), pp. 45–62.

[30]Behera, 'One world, many worlds'.

[31]Walter D. Mignolo, 'Decoloniality and phenomenology: The geopolitics of knowing and epistemic/ ontological colonial differences', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 32:3 (2018), p. 373.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the world because both the rational approaches to IR as well as the dominant relational approaches that emerge through a register with separation at its base are unequipped to fully grasp the implications of lifeways that start with interconnection as the fundamental condition of existence. This explains why their knowledge-claims and lived realities have been systematically denied, excluded, or necessarily relegated as primitive or unscientific. Surmounting this kind of ontological parochialism is, thus, imperative for fully exploring the potential of relational theorising in IR as repeatedly illustrated throughout this Special Issue.

As long as the unstated albeit deeply embedded existential commitments of separation-based ontological registers are not explicitly interrogated and disentangled from the resulting foundational knowledge categories of IR including concepts, languages, and ways of knowing, they will continue to both reproduce historical relations of dominance[32] and generate a consistent resonance between our learned existential commitments (knowingly or not) and the way the world seems to be. As a result, a certain kind of 'self-reinforcing homogeneity of ontological imaginaries' (see Reddekop) has severely limited how we consider it possible to think and live. The Special Issue, thus, makes a case for ontological pluralism at a foundational level.

This calls on IR scholars to further explore how separation-based ontological assumptions came to be naturalised and became the normative order of thought and being. Which conceptual devices were deployed to privilege these and suppress most other fundamental existential commitments effecting a kind of ontological parochialism that became axiomatic and, to what historical and political ends? We are yet to fully understand, for instance, as to how non-European philosophies, especially those originating in India or Africa travelled across the Mediterranean and how this cross-pollination with the Greek philosophies was excised out of the master narratives of the Western philosophy.[33] This excising gave rise to the assumption, reproduced in some of the canonical texts of the Enlightenment, that Indians and other non-Europeans were incapable of philosophical thinking.[34] According to Immanuel Kant, for instance, 'the Hindus were educable only in arts and not sciences [as] they will never achieve abstract concepts.'[35] Though India had a long tradition of science, astronomy, medicine, linguistics, and philosophical thought, as evident from the entire development of its Sankhya tradition, the *Upanishads*, or the development of Buddhism,[36] Orientalist scholarship represented India as a spiritual realm in contrast with the rationalism of the West. This can clearly be seen in Hegel's depiction of India as 'dream-like'.[37] Consequently, Indians and other non-European peoples were placed 'outside of history'[38] by Hegel, understood in terms of the unfolding of a 'world spirit' across a linear conception of time,[39] and the relational cosmology of *dharma* translated into the Abrahamic concept of religion (see Shani and Behera). Trownsell in this issue similarly draws attention to the 'silenced' fissure between the secular and the divine common to both linguistic turn and new materialist approaches that she sees as effecting various forms of reductionism, exclusion, and domination. Specifically, this fissure inhibits being in a place to hear, listen to, and learn from lifeways that do not start from the same fundamental existential assumption, because 'using

[32]Behera, 'One world, many worlds', p. 1594.

[33]See, Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon: 1780–1830* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013).

[34]See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

[35]Kant cited in Bryan W. Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 21–2. Kant's quote that 'philosophy is not to be found in the whole Orient', can be found in Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Kant und die Relegionen des Ostens* (Kitzingen Main: Holzner, 1954), p. 103. As cited in Chiara Bottici, 'Philosophy, coloniality and the politics of remembrance', *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 41:1 (2020), p. 29.

[36]Daya Krishna, *Civilizations: Nostalgia and Utopia* (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2012), p. 96.

[37]For a collection of Hegel's writings on India, see Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra (eds), *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[38]See Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

[39]See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. by Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the term "secular" to avoid dealing with the metaphysical, for example, actually reinforces the presence of the Judeo-Christian tradition.'

Likewise, the predominant strands of European philosophies enacted through a dualistic mode of thinking spawned many such deep fissures separating the domains of human and nature, science and religion and, science and politics – all of which have gone into forging the foundational bedrock of IR's disciplinary knowledge. And yet, for a very long time, IR had foreclosed the trajectories seeking to interrogate the making of such fissures on the ground that these are questions with '*settled*' answers that now lie beyond the purview of IR's scientific inquiries. Uncovering these silenced fissures allows us to understand their import and impact on the worlding practices that are critical to the domain knowledge of IR.

Recasting difference: Unsettling hierarchies

The Special Issue calls attention to the problem of ontological difference and how that has shaped the meta theory of IR – historically and politically. We argue that a debate on ontological pluralism will create the ground for unsettling hierarchies that are deeply embedded in its knowledge categories.

The metatheoretical premise for understanding difference in rationalist/foundational IR is mainly derived from Cartesian dualism, one of the dominant tradition in European philosophy, which in turn, was deeply influenced by Aristotle's 'either/or' logic or, the 'the law of the excluded middle' that stated: all propositions must affirm or deny something. It cannot be both.[40] European reflections on existence were predisposed to seeing human life in characteristic terms of either this or that as in 'true or false, good or evil, reason or faith, mind or body, man or nature, individual or society.'[41] Many relational cosmologies across the globe, in contrast, follow a 'both/and' approach or a non-dualistic mode of thinking. In *dharmic* cosmology, as Shani and Behera explain in this Special Issue, 'human reality carries within itself as its essential attribute a combination of opposites, and all opposites imply each other.'[42] Truth is 'neither susceptible to the logic of either/or, nor is it unilinear. Truth already implies untruth, and expresses itself at different levels of human consciousness, finding different expressions at different stages of life.'[43] Similarly, Confucianism's quest for oneness in the Tianxia cosmology is practically a recognition of endless varieties in that its quest for universal acceptance entails the capacity to improvise benevolence differently as sites and times change.[44] In another rendition of relational theory grounded in the epistemological schema of Chinese 'zhongyong dialectics', Qin explains that 'the yin-yang relationship is the meta-relationship that represents all relationships in the universe. It uses the "both-and" logic to negate the "either-or" way of thinking of Western episteme and argues for the simultaneity of self-existence and other-existence, and of self-existence and coexistence.'[45]

It is important to note, however, that some versions of these ancient relational cosmologies such as *dharma* and Confucianism were also hierarchical in different ways and we argue that problematising these through an open, engaging, and continuing dialogue is also imperative.[46] A pluriversal IR *should not be* 'a nationalist, nativist or atavistic project' that entails a 'wholesale rejection of Western social science'.[47] We do, however, argue that relational ways of knowing

[40]See Aristotle (350 BC), *Metaphysics*, trans. by W. D. Ross (Moscow: Roman Roads Media, 2013), p. 66.

[41]Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Dharma, India and the World Order: Twenty-One Essays* (Edinburgh, UK: Saint Andrews Press, 1993), p. 54.

[42]Badrinath cited by Shani and Behera in this Special Issue.

[43]Badrinath, *Dharma, India and the World Order*, p. 163.

[44]See Shih, this Special Issue. Also, Shih, 'Bound to relate'.

[45]Yaqing Qin as cited in Behera, 'One world, many worlds', p. 1592.

[46]See Behr and Shani, 'Rethinking emancipation in a critical IR'.

[47]Syed Farid Alatas, 'On the indigenisation of academic discourse', *Alternatives*, 18:3 (1993), p. 312.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and being can pave the way for fundamentally unsettling the ways the 'problem of difference' has traditionally been dealt with in international relations.[48] That is because different ontological registers yield a contrasting understanding of the foundational idea of 'self'. The idea of 'self' understood through the prior ontological assumption of separation rests upon a fundamental distinction between the self and the other and treats the perceived boundaries between the two based on differences as real and indelible. The distinguishing markers of such boundaries may change but the undergirding existential commitment to the assumption of boundaries is given and permanent. Such a distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' is a core constituent of what Shani and Behera (this Special Issue) term the 'secular cosmology of IR'.

A *relational* ontological register generates a very different 'kind' of selfhood in which there is no inherent or permanent self-other divisions, and that such a selfhood is continually cultivated through practices and relations, which makes for a rather 'porous' self. Reddekop in his contribution notes that Kichwa selfhood can be described as plural or multiple in the sense that it comprises a multiplicity of preferential relations. This perhaps recalls Marilyn Strathern's assertion that the relationally composed 'individual' is rather a 'dividual' or 'partible' self that is experienced always partially in and through particular (and varied) relationships.[49] To lose a relative here is to lose a part of oneself.[50] While relational barriers of 'difference' or 'otherness' are to one degree or another a condition of relating, these are also, accordingly, spaces or horizons of potential transformative learning and growing – of becoming more like others through conviviality with them. Shih explains that to overcome mutual alienation between ostensible strangers, Confucianism's role sensibilities are not registered in socialising strangers into consensual norms as in the Anglophone literature. Rather, Confucian role making functions to shield strangeness from incurring intervention and allow non-solutions to disputes over a difference (see Shih).

The contributors to the Special Issue argue that lifeways generated through relational ontological registers at a cosmological level have remained unintelligible in the Western lexicon, which have over the *longue dureé* led to fundamentally structuring the knowledge categories in a way that postulated social knowledge in a hierarchical arrangement. Its consequences were twofold. First, this resulted in making sharp distinctions by separating, dividing, and delimiting each field of study to its defined space and jurisdiction in a way that politics was separated from ethics, on the one hand and religion, in its deepest sense, on the other. Similar disciplinary moves have since long been deployed to determine what does or does not belong to IR's domain of knowledge. Second, its underlying logic had in a very elemental way generated the practices of 'othering', which backed by the power of imperialism, were reproduced and reinforced as a normative order of thought fragmenting human and social identities and pitting one against the other. Over time, such practices produced a whole range of 'binaries' such as civilised versus savages, men versus native, men versus women, white versus black, and reason versus belief cast in an implicit hierarchy where the 'self' or the first category is privileged, devaluing and invariably delegitimizing the 'other'.[51]

We argue that the atomistic ontologies endemically fail to acknowledge, read, and understand difference in an open, unbiased, and uncoloured manner and that an open-minded engagement with the relational ontological registers can potentially proffer other approaches to understanding difference in a non-hierarchical manner.[52] To show how a switch in ontological registers can

[48]See Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

[49]Marilyn Strathern, 'Losing (out on) intellectual resources', in Alain Pottage and Martha Mundy (eds), *Law, Anthropology, and the Constitution of the Social: Making Persons and Things* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 228.

[50]Peter Gow, 'Helpless – the affective precondition of Piro social life', in Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (eds), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), p. 48.

[51]Behera, 'One world, many worlds', p. 1581.

[52]Trownsell et al., 'Differing about difference'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

change the very nature of what we perceive and how we engage it, Trownsell in this Special Issue 'contrasts binaries such as black/white, inside/outside, separation/interconnection, conflict/peace'. A separation-based register will produce a reading whereby the relationship is secondary to their existential independence. Each element of these pairs is thus treated as ontologically autonomous, and this very ontological manoeuvre fosters seeing them through an either-or logic and therefore treating each element in hierarchical terms. A robustly relational register, such as that employed in the Andes, starts with the relation. The perceived difference across these complementary-opposite impulses is critical to life, in fact, the friction generated between the elements of these parity-based relations is 'the very source of the vibration that animates life.' Querejazu in this Special Issue builds on this concept to argue that expanding relational frameworks fosters other types of dialogue based on ontological difference and the bridges (relations) among them by addressing difference not as a problem but as a necessary ingredient of existence.

Relational ways of knowing and being

Relational ways of knowing and being have the potential to transform and augment IR's toolkit for better understanding the complexities of our diverse lived realities across the globe. To begin with, cultivating an awareness of the relatedness of all beings and the universe entails recasting our modes of inquiry that divide life into the contrasting polarities of an either/or kind, as discussed earlier. Relational cosmologies provide a way to cut through the familiar dichotomies characteristic of social science like objectivity and subjectivity, facts and values, reason and belief and, what 'is' and 'ought to be' altogether. Given the foundational premise that everything in life is interconnected, this also holds true for the ways of knowing, being, and becoming in the relational cosmos.

The epistemological frameworks of both conventional and critical IR are hemmed in as they remain tethered to Eurocentrism by way of their shared commitment to sensory experiences and reason as the primary sources of knowledge and authority notwithstanding their differences on whether such knowledge claims can be tested on the facts/value and objectivity/subjectivity parameters.[53] Relational cosmologies, by contrast, find these ways of engaging the world to be very limiting and inadequate for understanding the multidimensionality of human and cosmic realities. From this vantage point, no methods of inquiry are privileged over others nor held true a priori to determine what is worth knowing or not and, how.

In the Australian Aboriginal perspective (see Brigg, Graham, and Weber) all perspectives (truths) are valid and reasonable. Meanwhile many indigenous communities in the Andes hold that everything is interrelated by dual and complementary forces that make up a 'corresponding world' wherein 'faculties are also complementary: reason and intuition balance and complement each other, and together they constitute our cosmic awareness' (see Querejazu). She further explains that this correspondence can also be exemplified in Mayan tojolabal *'ab 'al y k'umal'* 'I speak you listen'[54] or in the Ubuntu expression 'I am we; I am because we are; we are because I am.'[55] Accordingly, 'wisdom, knowledge, facts, truths are not "out there" but co-generated, maintained and propagated in relation. Every process of knowing and being is necessarily a collective process involving human and other-than-human participation, a cosmic practice.'

Significantly, the 'positivist criteria for knowledge' are no longer unquestioned even in the modern sciences, as Kurki explains in this Special Issue. Instead, 'classical postpositivist

[53]Navnita Chadha Behera, 'State and sovereignty', in Arlene B. Tickner and Karen Smith (eds), *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), p. 143. See also Behr and Shani, 'Rethinking emancipation' for a discussion of the Eurocentrism of critical IR.

[54]Luis Enrique Cachiguango, 'Asi nomas compartimos nuestras prácticas, saberes, sentires y conocimientos', as cited by Querejazu in this Special Issue.

[55]Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (London, UK and New York, NY: Sage Publications Inc., 2012), p. 109, as cited by Querejazu in this Special Issue.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

paradigms of interpretivism or constructivism' have been revealed as manifestations of 'a particular kind of Western humanist relationalism, relationalism which has delimited the ways in which we can and could "loosen ourselves" into the world.' The aim of relational cosmology, Kurki adds, is to say that 'while the traditional conceptual categories of Western science have led to some of the discoveries of cosmological patterns, these conceptual tools *fundamentally delimit* our ability to understand what the cosmos has been telling us. We need to then undo and redo our conceptual tools to realign with the world.'

Relational cosmologies open up new possibilities in terms of retooling our methods to devise alternate and disruptive knowledge categories by learning from the lived realities of people around the globe. IR as it stands does not speak to billions of people across the globe and that must change. Instead of filtering out the ground realities of large parts of the world to somehow fit into given knowledge frames, it is time, we argue, to work out different methods of inquiry and find ways to let people speak and be heard on their own terms. As Brigg, Graham, and Weber (this Special Issue) point out, knowing requires knowers to be participants first. IR forgets this social fact to install the privileged perspective of the social science observer and accompanying colonial hierarchies. This enables the fiction that interpolity ordering arises 'behind the backs' of actors in the international system. Conversely, the Aboriginal Australian interpolity ordering system that they discuss 'has all actors "in-play", bringing about the ordering of the system, with all actors deemed (in principle) of being able to understand the mechanisms and systems for bringing about order' (see Brigg, Graham, and Weber). *Cosmopraxis*, as explained by Querejazu in this issue, is another such example. *Cosmopraxis* highlights the importance of everyday-life 'relational methods' that can also be cultivated or practiced to develop the sensibilities to become more aware and versatile in moving and connecting with other worlds. Consequently, she adds that 'some acts of commemoration that create and cultivate relations also create meaning and knowledge (like sharing food)' and that these 'enabl[e] alternatives to the privileged ways of "knowledge production"' that categorise, distinguish, and control.

Although we have faced theoretical and methodological challenges to diversify, in IR we are just now beginning to confront what becoming ontologically plural implies. We have yet to know 'how to work nimbly across multiple ontological registers, which makes it challenging to engage effectively with lifeways not built through the same existential assumptions that inform the predominant register' (see Trownsell). In other words we have yet to generate the tools for fully engaging across worlds, which then hamstrings the whole discipline from being able to do what it purports to explain: our worlds.

Structure of Special Issue

The various contributions provide answers to the questions posed in the Special Issue in different ways. Most engage explicitly with different cosmological traditions in the Americas, Asia, and Australia and all conceive of relationality in a manner that ontologically begins by assuming interconnection as prior to the existence of entities. In the opening contribution, Tamara Trownsell attempts a recrafting of how we commonly approach ontology in IR through an engagement with Andean *cosmovivencias* (forms of living in the cosmos) that start with interconnection as the primordial condition of existence. She argues that the co-created fruits of these knowings – the lifeways, forms of sensing, concepts, and logics –cannot be fully grasped through a separation-based ontological register. Certain ideas are no longer conceivable, such as anthropocentrism, an existentially autonomous self or forms of governance defined by a specific time period, like four years, as opposed to the emergent configuration of circumstances. Very different understandings of the collective and how we co-participate in it surge forth, such as *ayni* (a much more robust understanding of co-creation) and *ayllu* (community understood as family).

In contrast to the many indigenous cosmological traditions highlighted in the Special Issue, Milja Kurki in her contribution shows how the scientific field of 'relational cosmology' may be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

productive in facilitating conversations among multiple relationalities emerging from different parts of the world. If relational thought in IR has challenged the colonial and bifurcated ontologies of the field, relational cosmology, she argues, too assists in shifting 'modern' understandings of science and the cosmos by facilitating engagement with situated knowledges and deep-going relationalities across 'nature' and 'society', 'human' and 'non-human' communities. Kurki outlines the implications of what she terms the 'relational revolution' for IR: contributing to conversations on humanism, posthumanisms, and decolonial thought; foregrounding new dimensions of relationality; and raising questions around democracy, science and what a transdisciplinary ethical practice or ethos would mean. However, reflecting its relational and pluriversal origins, relational cosmology is not proposed as a new 'meta' or 'grand' narrative for relational theorising in IR.

Giorgio Shani and Navnita Chadha Behera explicitly engage with a different relational cosmology, that of *dharma*, in order to 'provincialise' the 'secular cosmology of IR' which, they claim, is based on a linear conception of time, a clear distinction between self and other, and an international order of sovereign states. In contrast, the concept of *dharma* offers a mode of understanding the multidimensionality of human existence without negating any of its varied, contradictory expressions. A dharmic order assuming interconnection as prior to the existence of entities brings into question the 'secular cosmology' of IR by deconstructing notions of self and other, and illustrates how all beings are related to one another in a moral, social, and cosmic order premised on human agency, which flows from 'inside out' rather than 'outside-in' and that is governed by heterotemporality.

Drawing on Amazonian Kichwa thinking and Anishinaabe accounts of treaties, Jarrad Reddekop shows how these accounts recast how it is possible to relate with difference by folding an interhuman 'international' into a fabric of relations interweaving human and non-human ones. He suggests that non-Indigenous people can draw a range of provocations concerning the practice and constitution of political space and selfhoods. However, he cautions that this more transformative potential can be squandered through what he terms 'ontological capture': the 'absorption of the issues raised into modern Western ontological categories and consequent framings of political possibility'. This capture results in the shrinking of our ontological horizons and the naturalisation or entrenching of the dominant Western framing of existence at the expense of possible alternatives.

Amaya Querejazu, in her contribution, suggests a way of engaging with different relationalities while avoiding ontological capture: by focusing on the *how* of relations relating – that is, the constant and ongoing interaction of co-constitutive and transformative processes – rather than defining what relationality is. Drawing on the worldings of the Aymara communities in the Andes who share a relational cosmology, she develops the concept of *Cosmopraxis*, a complex, pluriversal, multidimensional set of experiences that illustrate how relations relate without fixing their meaning. *Cosmopraxis*, she states, is 'about worlding, performing, and relating, using daily lived practices (or relational ways) that connect us to the cosmos'. It furthermore contributes to the discussion about how worldings as situated practices constitute realities and reflect the coexistence of difference – insights that are highly relevant to forging a pluriversal IR.

Engaging with Aboriginal Australian indigenous political systems, Morgan Brigg, Mary Graham, and Martin Weber similarly offer a different way of reconfiguring IR along relational lines. The substantively relational nature of interpolity relations of many indigenous peoples predate IR and invite a rethinking of IR's understandings of political order and interpolity relations. They take up this task by laying out necessary methodological innovations to engage with Aboriginal Australia, demonstrating a need to take it as a system on its own terms in order to speak back to IR. Aboriginal Australian people produced political order on the Australian continent through what they term a 'relational-ecological' disposition that contrasts with IR's predominant 'survivalist' disposition. They argue that while it is necessary to critique and recast dominant IR, doing so requires putting dominant IR and indigenous understandings into relational exchange.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Finally, Chih-yu Shih takes up the theme of relational exchange between Confucian and Western conceptions of relationality, whose practitioners regard each other as strangers. Shih attempts to bridge the gap between the two through the application of role theory focusing on two different types of relations: prior rule-based relations and improvised relations. The differences in the cultural preparation for these two types of relations partially explain the plurality of the relational universe. Confucian relations propose that, for all nations, the necessity of having a certain role relation is a more important agenda than insisting on exactly what role to take. Shih illustrates this by taking the case of Kim Jong-un and North Korea as an example. Role theory, Shih suggests, is one way to reconnect seemingly irreconcilable relational universes.

Conclusion

The various contributions to this Special Issue start from the premise *of interconnection as prior to the existence of entities*. Most of the contributions go beyond the confines of Western social science by examining how different cosmological traditions in the Americas, Asia, and Australia view and practice relationality. From the Aymara and Kichwa traditions of the Andes or Amazonia (see Trownsell, Reddekop, and Querejazu), through to the *dharmic* and Confucian cosmologies of Asia (see Shani and Behera, Shih) and indigenous political systems of Aboriginal Australia (see Brigg, Graham, and Weber), the contributions examine relationality as practiced in different geocultural locales albeit in ways that transcend the specificities of their loci and engage with IR. Most illustrate that relationality is often understood instinctively as a process which is constitutive of their social worlds: the focus is on the *how* of relations relating rather than with what 'relationality' is, as Querejazu puts it in her contribution. This helps explains the tension between the categories of Shani and Behera's 'secular cosmology of IR' and indigenous, non-Western lifeways. Notwithstanding the 'epistemicide'[56] resulting from the colonialisation of the 'new' worlds, several contributors to the Special Issue highlight the continued existence of indigenous relational political traditions that may co-exist with (Western) IR despite the risk of what Reddekop terms 'ontological capture'. An engagement with these relational traditions and their conception of space, time, self-other relations, selfhood, praxis, and political and social order, can, at the very least, help make IR less 'ontologically parochial' (see Brigg, Graham, and Weber) and make us more 'ontologically agile' (see Trownsell). This opens the possibility of forging a *pluriversal* research agenda for IR based on uncovering IR's silenced pasts, unsettling hierarchies and examining relational ways of knowing and being. Such a research agenda should start from the premise that IR needs to be understood from *different* ontological and cosmological registers and that entails the reconceptualisation not only of relationality but of the discipline itself.

Contemporary IR generally resists the expressions of ontological and cosmological difference *in its own terms.* Different cosmological traditions face the following quandary: if they differ radically from the dominant conception of ontology in IR, then they need to justify how it speaks to IR. If, on the other hand, they seek to engage with IR on its terms, they may succumb to 'ontological capture' and may not even be heard. And, if they seek to engage in what Brigg et al. term a 'relational exchange' or bridge 'gaps' (see Shih) by seeking common ground, they are obligated to explain 'what's new'? The Special Issue hopes to contribute to starting new conversations on relationality in which different ontological and cosmological traditions can participate in their own terms in order to forge a pluriversal IR.

[56]Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014).

Cite this article: Trownsell, T., Behera, N. C., Shani, G. 2022. Introduction to the Special Issue: Pluriversal relationality. *Review of International Studies* **48**, 787–800. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000389 Published online by Cambridge University Press