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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A contextual approach to decolonising IR: Interrogating knowledge production hierarchies

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Abstract
Although calls to decolonise International Relations (IR) have become more prominent, the endeavour becomes infinitely more complex when searching for concrete approaches to decolonise IR knowledge production. We posit that decolonising IR, a global counter-hegemonic political project to dismantle and transform dominant knowledge production practices, must be enacted according to context-specific particularities. Contexts shape practices of epistemological decolonisation, since knowledge hierarchies are enacted and experienced – and must be challenged and dismantled – differently in different sites. Yet although acknowledged as important, contexts are understudied and under-theorised. This raises several questions: how do contexts matter to IR knowledge production, in what ways, and with what effects? This article disaggregates six contexts in IR knowledge production – material, spatial, disciplinary, political, embodied, and temporal – and explores how they impact academic practices. We bring together hitherto-disparate insights into the role of contexts in knowledge production from Global IR, Political Sociology, Feminist Studies, Higher Education Studies, and Critical Geopolitics, illustrating them with empirical evidence from 30 interviews with IR scholars across a variety of countries and academic institutions. We argue that an interrogation of the inequalities produced through these contexts brings us closer towards developing concrete tools to dismantle entrenched hierarchies in IR knowledge production.

Keywords: contexts; decolonisation; epistemology; International Relations; knowledge production

Introduction

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has long been concerned with the politics of knowledge production. Constructivist, critical, post-colonial, post-structural and practice-based approaches to IR have been shaped by landmark studies exposing the historical situatedness of IR concepts,[1] the role of practices in transforming academic power relations,[2] and the importance of researcher reflexivity.[3] Decolonising IR, which seeks to expose historical processes of

[1]Richard Ashley, 'Untying the sovereign state: A double reading of the anarchy problematique', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 17:2 (1988), pp. 227–62; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[2]Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of practices, practices of power', *International Political Sociology*, 5 (2011), pp. 225–58; Michael C. Williams, *Culture and Security Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

[3]Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, 'Advancing a reflexive International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 805–23; Inanna Hamati-Ataya, 'Reflectivity, reflexivity, reflexivism: IR's "reflexive turn" – and beyond', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:4 (2013), pp. 669–94.

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epistemological domination and overturn hegemonic narratives, has revitalised and extended these important questions about the production, dissemination, and practice of IR knowledges.[4] Its focus hitherto has rightly and necessarily centred on the hegemonic Western-centric narratives that continue to dominate the discipline.[5] However, in extending the decolonial endeavour more widely to address imperial legacies and knowledge hierarchies around the world, this important project becomes infinitely more complex. Whose narratives are we decentring, whose voices are we bringing in, and how? Furthermore, who decides who can speak and who must be 'provincialised'? What does decolonising IR mean in different geographical and institutional locales, and to what extent can decolonisation be 'global'?

This article argues that conceptualising the contextual nature of knowledge production is essential for epistemic decolonisation, since knowledge hierarchies are enacted and experienced – and therefore must be challenged and dismantled – differently in different sites. These extend beyond geo-cultural locales since, as we show below, knowledge hierarchies are experienced differently by scholars based within the same national context and even the same institution. A recognition of the situatedness of IR knowledge production practices by scholars operating in vastly unequal settings, both within and across institutions around the world, eschews a 'tick-box' or 'one-size-fits-all' approach to decolonising the discipline. It invites an approach sensitive to the constraints and opportunities available to scholars differently embedded within unequal, unfair, and discriminatory academic structures. This approach builds on existing decolonial scholarship to demonstrate that universalising Western-centric ontologies of the 'international' must be replaced by new conceptions that reflect the situated multiplicity of a global, decentred discipline.[6]

IR knowledge is produced by, constituted through, and consumed in specific contexts – these contexts are characterised by different resources, institutional structures, frames of meaning, and relations of power. Yet although widely acknowledged as important, the concept of 'context' in IR knowledge production remains largely understudied and under-theorised. It is frequently mentioned but rarely defined or disaggregated, without identifying the ensembles of factors that shape scholarly practices or the effects they have on knowledge production in IR. Certainly, existing literature captures the ways in which situated knowledge production practices affect what we know about world politics. Recent interventions, for instance, have uncovered the importance of materiality,[7] coloniality,[8] bodily experiences,[9] and socio-political contexts[10] in knowledge production. These are important works that we seek to extend and contribute to. However, debates often remain in silos, without examining the interaction of various contexts, or they are rooted in binaries

[4]Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, 'The house of IR: From family power politics to the poisies of worldism', *International Studies Review*, 6:4 (2004), pp. 21–49; Julie Cupples and Ramon Grosvoguel (eds), *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Robbie Shilliam, *Decolonizing Politics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021); Somdeep Sen, 'Decolonising to reimagine International Relations: An introduction', *Review of International Studies*, 49:3 (2023), pp. 339–45.

[5]Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancığlu, (eds), *Decolonising the University* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Zeynep Gulsah Capan, 'Decolonising International Relations?', *Third World Quarterly*, 38:1 (2017), pp. 1–15.

[6]Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in plain sight: Racism in International Relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 71–92; John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Relations Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[7]Melody Fonseca, 'Global IR and Western dominance: Moving forward or Eurocentric entrapment?', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 48:1 (2019), pp. 45–59; Isaac Kamola, 'IR, the critic, and the world: From reifying the discipline to decolonising the university', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 48:3 (2020), pp. 245–70.

[8]Nitasha Kaul, 'Representing Bhutan: A critical analysis of the politics of knowledge production', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 49:4 (2021), pp. 629–67; Jasmine K. Gani and Jenna Marshall, 'The impact of colonialism on policy and knowledge production in International Relations', *International Affairs*, 98:1 (2022), pp. 5–22.

[9]Enrike Van Wingerden, 'Unmastering research: Positionality and intercorporeal vulnerability in International Studies', *International Political Sociology*, 16 (2022), pp. 1–17.

[10]Katarzyna Kaczmarska, *Making Global Knowledge in Local Contexts: The Politics of International Relations and Policy Advice in Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

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that assume or reproduce Western epistemological dominance and non-Western subordination, inviting greater analysis of knowledge production practices beyond such dichotomous framings.

This article develops a novel framework for interpreting the role of context in IR knowledge production and understanding its impact on the global project to decolonise IR. It demonstrates that knowledge production is shaped by layers of contexts and, consequently, that decolonising IR should be a context-sensitive endeavour. We define context in IR knowledge production as a bounded and situated relational structure that links the individual scholar to their environment, conditioning and shaping knowledge production practices and, consequently, knowledge claims.[11] Contexts manifest themselves in potentially limitless spheres of activity and can be challenging to typify. This article nevertheless disaggregates six prominent and interrelated types of context: material; spatial; disciplinary; political; embodied; and temporal. We bring together hitherto-disparate insights into the role of context(s) in knowledge production from a wide range of literature, including Global IR, Political Sociology, Feminist Studies, Higher Education Studies, Area Studies, and Critical Geopolitics, illustrating our framework with empirical evidence from qualitative interviews conducted with 30 IR scholars across 5 regions and 14 countries and based in a variety of academic institutions. In doing so, we respond to Gelardi's call for 'reflections that speak to international politics as they are experienced in different sites across the world'.[12] Our analysis shows that distinguishing and accounting for different contexts is fundamental for the practice of decolonising IR, as these relational structures can privilege different voices and sustain different hierarchies in different sites of knowledge production. This reveals the limited utility of universalising 'tick-box' approaches to address hegemonic knowledge structures and suggests that a truly global project of epistemic decolonisation must always respond to the power–knowledge structures experienced by scholars through the intermeshing of these contexts.

We proceed in three sections. First, we locate our discussion of context within existing scholarship on situated knowledge production. We also summarise our methodology and positionality, highlighting the contextual particularities that motivated this joint research agenda. Second, we elaborate our six contexts that (re)shape the processes and practices of IR knowledge production. Finally, we examine the implications of our argument for decolonising IR and conclude that a global decolonial project must always pay attention to the interplay of contexts that manifest across spatial scales and are experienced by scholars differently situated within them.

Situated knowledge production and the role of context

Universalist approaches to the study of the social world appeared to have been vindicated with the end of the Cold War. In the discipline's mainstream, context was thought to be irrelevant, as positivist, nomothetic approaches such as behaviouralism, modernisation theory, and rational choice were seen to explain social processes around the world.[13] At best, context was seen 'as a holder for the variety of local causal factors that one has not clearly specified or that one does not fully understand'.[14] Over the years, however, the discipline has become more cognisant that universal theory-building based solely on Western experiences is ethically problematic and creates fundamental misunderstandings about international politics. The broader acceptance of a social world that is conceptualised differently in different social, geographical, and cultural settings began to

[11]By knowledge production practices, we refer to the research and teaching practices through which we produce and disseminate knowledge, including data collection and analysis, writing and publishing, syllabi design and delivery, supervision and mentoring, as well as conference attendance and networking.

[12]Maiken Gelardi, 'Moving global IR forward: A road map', *International Studies Review*, 22:4 (2020), pp. 830–52 (p. 833).

[13]Dirk Berg-Schlosser, 'Comparative Area Studies: The golden mean between Area Studies and universalist approaches?', in Ariel I. Ahram, Patrick Kollner, and Rudra Sil (eds), *Comparative Area Studies: Methodological Rationales and Cross-Regional Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 29–44.

[14]Marc Beissinger, 'Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and the plurality of Area Studies: A view from the social sciences', in Zoran Milutinovic (ed.), *The Rebirth of Area Studies: Challenges for History, Politics and International Relations in the 21st Century* (London: IB Taurus, 2020), pp. 129–50 (p. 134).

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recentre critical, post-colonial, and non-Western theorists who had previously operated on the margins of the discipline.

Consequently, the IR discipline has become increasingly self-reflexive, interrogating how knowledge about the 'global' is produced, disseminated and reshaped. The discipline continues to be characterised by wide-ranging debates over theoretical and methodological pluralism, 'core–periphery' dynamics, and the effects and impact of different geo-cultural settings on knowledge production.[15] Approaches that diversify and decolonise IR knowledge production are now more prominent, emphasising the imperial legacies and Eurocentrism that continue to shape the politics of inclusion and exclusion across journal publishing practices, curriculum development, the university, and constructions of the 'global'.[16] These important disciplinary developments have generated greater awareness of power differentials and entrenched hierarchies in IR knowledge production.

Within these discussions, the concept of context is frequently invoked but remains under-theorised, while the related concept of 'situated knowledge' has received more treatment. With its intellectual roots in feminism and post-colonialism, situated knowledge foregrounds one's positionality and encourages researchers to reflect on the ways in which their subjectivity has co-constructed their knowledge claims and to write this subjectivity into their research.[17] Although the concepts of situated knowledge and context are related and overlap, the former tends to foreground identity and positionality, while the latter focuses more on the environmental circumstances that interact with this identity. Grondin and D'Aoust illustrate this conceptual crossover: 'A politics of situated scholarship addresses the conditions of knowledge production, the subjective context of individual scholars, as well as the institutional context in which they are embedded.'[18] Context, therefore, is a more extensive concept than situated knowledge. It places the positionality of a scholar in a set of broader relations, encompassing the wide range of structural inequalities and external challenges that shape global academia. We build on Grossberg's articulation that 'first, context is spatial, defining a bounded interiority, a stable island of ordered presence in the midst of an otherwise empty or chaotic space; second, context is relational, constituted always by sets

[15]Pinar Bilgin, 'Security in the Arab world and Turkey: Differently different', in Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney (eds), *Thinking International Relations Differently* (New York: Routledge, 2012) pp. 27–47; Peter M. Kristensen, 'Revisiting the "American social science": Mapping the geography of International Relations', *International Studies Perspectives*, 16:3 (2015), pp. 246–69; Mathis Lohaus and Wiebke Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 'Who publishes where? Exploring the geographical diversity of global IR journals', *International Studies Review*, 23 (2021), pp. 645–69; Beverley Loke and Catherine Owen, 'Mapping practices and spatiality in IR knowledge production: From detachment to emancipation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 28:1 (2022), pp. 30–57; Daniel Maliniak, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J. Tierney, 'Is International Relations a global discipline? Hegemony, insularity, and diversity in the field', *Security Studies*, 27:3 (2018), pp. 448–84; Vineet Thakur and Karen Smith, 'Introduction to the special issue: The multiple births of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 47:5 (2021), pp. 571–9; Tickner and Blaney, *Thinking International Relations Differently*; Ole Wæver, 'The sociology of a not so international discipline: American and European developments in International Relations', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 687–727.

[16]Amitav Acharya, 'Global International Relations and regional worlds: A new agenda for International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58:4 (2014), pp. 647–59; Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, 'Problematising the global in global IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 49:1 (2020), pp. 32–57; Kamola, 'IR, the critic, and the world'; Felix Mantz, 'Decolonizing the IPE syllabus: Eurocentrism and the coloniality of knowledge in International Political Economy', *Review of International Political Economy*, 26:6 (2019), pp. 1361–78.

[17]Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', *Boundary 2*, 12:3–13:1 (1984), pp. 333–58; Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14:3 (1988), pp. 575–99; Marysia Zalewski, 'Feminist standpoint theory meets International Relations theory: A feminist version of David and Goliath', *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 17:2 (1993), pp. 13–32; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Milja Kurki, 'Stretching situated knowledge: From standpoint epistemology to cosmology and back again', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:3 (2015), pp. 779–97.

[18]David Grondin and Anne-Marie D'Aoust, 'For an undisciplined take on International Relations: The politics of situated scholarship', in Andreas Gofas, Inanna Hamati-Ataya, and Nicholas Onuf (eds), *The Sage Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2018), pp. 414–65 (p. 415).

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and trajectories of social relations and relationalities that establish its exteriority to itself'.[19] There are explicit agent–structure dynamics at work here: the broader structure shapes, but does not predetermine, social practices because that same structure can be more enabling or constraining depending on one's positionality. Hence, we understand context in IR knowledge production as a specific set of conditions that shape knowledge production practices and emerge from the interplay of positionality and structure.

This article examines *why* contexts matter and *how* they shape the production of knowledge in IR. Its contribution is twofold. First, we centre the concept of context in IR knowledge production as a bridge to connect discussions taking place in other, related fields. Although substantial work on academic positionality, structural inequality, and entrenched hierarchies exists across the social sciences, these bodies of literature have not been fully brought into dialogue with one another.[20] In this regard, our paper is less about identifying a concrete 'gap' per se, and more about bridge-building across existing bodies of work. No single context can fully account for the messy complexity of reality. Acknowledging the roles that different contexts play simultaneously in shaping knowledge, therefore, requires a commitment to theoretical pluralism, insofar as we may interrogate different contexts, depending on the particular knowledge production process we wish to understand. As Levine and McCourt articulate, 'pluralism necessarily entails epistemological skepticism: the position that no single knowledge system can ever possess the whole truth, at least as this applies to political matters'.[21] We extend existing discussions on context and situated knowledge in diverse scholarly fields in order to develop a wider appreciation of the role of entangled contexts in IR knowledge production.

Second, our article demonstrates that contexts matter for decolonising IR, which seeks to reveal entrenched historic power relations and decentre dominant narratives. We emphasise the *politics* of context and posit that a truly global commitment to decolonising knowledge production must engage with the following situated dimensions of power: first, the diversity of ways that material and ideational power have both been exercised and experienced; second, the tools, opportunities, and constraints that derive from the positionality of those seeking to redress unequal power relations; and, third, the broader environmental structures that amplify certain narratives over others. These three aspects are linked. For instance, the narratives that become hegemonic are often different in different contexts, and the available means to challenge them also vary in different contexts. Our interview respondents, cited below, highlight this complexity. Paying attention to the various contexts in which knowledge is produced and disseminated allows us to examine how to enact epistemic decolonisation in practice.[22]

To do so, we disaggregate six contexts that shape individual scholars' knowledge production in IR, grounded in the lived experiences and everyday academic practices of our interview respondents. We examine how these contexts impact knowledge production and scholarship, providing conceptually driven and empirically grounded insights into the uneven epistemological landscapes that constitute the IR discipline. Two caveats are necessary. First, our framework is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all possible contexts, but an exploration of how various contexts experienced by IR scholars (some less visible in the existing literature) shape their knowledge

[19]Lawrence Grossberg, 'Theorising context', in David Featherstone and Joe Painter (eds), *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 32–43 (p. 32).

[20]See, for instance, Fonseca, 'Global IR and Western dominance'; Kaczmarska, *Making Global Knowledge in Local Contexts*; Terri Kim, 'Academic mobility, transnational identity capital, and stratification under conditions of academic capitalism', *Higher Education*, 73 (2017), pp. 981–97; Monika Thakur, 'Navigating multiple identities: Decentering International Relations', *International Studies Review*, 23:2 (2021), pp. 409–33; Arlene B. Tickner, 'The unequal profession', in Andreas Gofas, Inanna Hamati-Ataya, and Nicholas Onuf (eds), *The Sage Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2018), pp. 343–58.

[21]Daniel Levine and David McCourt, 'Why does pluralism matter when we study politics? A view from contemporary International Relations', *Perspectives on Politics*, 16:1 (2018), pp. 92–109 (p. 93).

[22]Karen Tucker, 'Unraveling coloniality in International Relations: Knowledge, relationality, and strategies for engagement', *International Political Sociology*, 12:2 (2018), pp. 215–32.

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production practices. Second, we move beyond a focus on geo-cultural epistemology, which has been extensively and compellingly conducted by other scholars.[23] Instead, our framework disaggregates the contexts influencing knowledge production across a variety of spatial scales to demonstrate similarities, differences, and connections that include, but are not limited to, geographically situated experiences. This article thus seeks to foreground the relationship between micro and macro scales, examine agent–structure dynamics, and highlight inequalities across different sites of knowledge production.

Methodology

Between 2019 and 2022, we conducted interviews with 30 IR scholars based in 14 different countries. The majority of these took place during conferences, visiting fellowships, and other international academic events, with seven interviews conducted online. Respondents were recruited in a variety of ways: by researching conference participants' academic biographies online and approaching those we felt might be interested in this research agenda; through informal conversations on related topics with colleagues during research visits, which led to a formal interview invitation; by asking our existing research network for recommendations of colleagues to interview; and by contacting colleagues whose work we had found interesting and conducting interviews online. In semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 90 minutes, respondents were asked about their career trajectories, the extent to which they could pursue the research they felt most passionate about, and in which ways their institution supported the development of their research. Our interviewees spanned a very diverse group of scholars at a variety of career stages, working in institutions across Africa, Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East.[24] Importantly, we do not present our interviews as a 'representative sample' of the global scholarly community but rather use them to provide illustrations of the lived experiences of scholars as they navigate the constraints and privileges afforded by our six contexts.

We conceptualised the contexts inductively by mining transcripts for accounts of the factors that shaped respondents' ability to produce the knowledge they wanted, with the most frequently mentioned factors becoming our six contexts. This empirical data was subsequently woven into existing literature drawn from a wide variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, namely Global IR, Political Sociology, Feminist Studies, Higher Education Studies, and Critical Geopolitics. However, as with any abstraction, the six contexts elaborated below are ideal types intended to be used as conceptual tools to disaggregate the layers of influence that mould knowledge claims. In reality, contexts intermesh with one another, compounding their influence and exacerbating their effects. We return to this point in the final section.

This joint research project grew out of pedagogical discussions around diversifying and decolonising the IR curriculum but subsequently transformed into more theoretical analyses of global knowledge production practices. It is distinct from our primary research areas on the Asia-Pacific and Eurasia respectively, and we are cognisant of the institutional freedom, alongside both material privileges and constraints, that we have received in pursuing this line of research. As two female academics trained and working in universities based in the 'West' but from or having

[23] Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (eds), *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds), *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on Asia and Beyond* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Tickner and Blaney (eds), *Thinking International Relations Differently*; Audrey Alejandro, *Western Dominance in International Relations? The Internationalisation of IR in Brazil and India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

[24] We refer to respondents based on the country in which their university is located for two reasons: first, this was the main prism through which scholars reported their experiences; and second, to illustrate how globally transmitted academic praxis entangles with different spatial scales and cultural traditions. We acknowledge that our sample's geographical reach is partial and lacks respondents based at institutions in Latin America. While cautious of making deterministic assumptions about how different regions practice IR, we recognise that such inclusion may have provided further insights on the intersections between neoliberalism and the state, as well as academia and the foreign policy establishment. See Arlene B. Tickner, 'Latin America: Still policy dependent after all these years?', in Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (eds), *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 32–52.

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worked in Asia, we have a shared disposition sympathetic to broader critical disciplinary developments raised by Global IR and Decolonising IR. This article is thus written with the hope that revealing the structural incentives and limitations imposed through various contexts may work towards achieving a more equitable global scholarly community.

Contexts shaping IR knowledge production

Material context

Academia is constituted by a series of institutions that provide the material structure in which academics work. This materiality conditions everyday knowledge production practices and thus requires a critical interrogation of the ways in which academic capitalism, the neoliberalisation of universities, and the political economy of higher education reproduce coloniality, reinforce core–periphery access to material and symbolic capital, as well as heighten inequalities within the 'core' and 'periphery'.[25] As Kamola observes: 'The political economy of higher education is increasingly defined by intensified marketisation, measurement, and stratification, as universities around the world find themselves pressured to mimic the oligopoly of elite, Western academic institutions.'[26] Indeed, practices that emulate 'core' institutions to achieve recognition, attain a sense of belonging in the 'international', and compete in global rankings reproduce dominant structures and the geopolitics of knowledge.[27] One of our respondents highlighted: 'International Relations in Japan is completely dominated by American discourses of international relations. Importing discourses of American International Relations is something that they're supposed to do in International Relations classes in Japan.'[28] Another in Singapore also lamented the emulation of Western academic structures: 'Everyone seems to be wedded to, or complicit even in the silence, with the hegemony of Western frameworks, which is sad … They think that to go up the league tables, we have to do everything that the best Western schools, graduate schools, of International Studies offer, which is I think extremely short-sighted.'[29]

This material context impacts everyday working conditions. 'If, indeed, knowledge is socially situated', as Tickner surmises, 'the specific details of employment and everyday life seem crucial for understanding how academic careers differ from place to place.'[30] This is especially so given that academic career trajectories around the world are increasingly tied to the standardisation of Western neoliberal academic benchmarks. Low salaries, heavy teaching loads, and limited access to resources are just some of the material realities confronting many academics globally, which in turn shape epistemic practices. The growing casualisation of employment has led to feelings of transience and job insecurity. This precarity very often results in higher workloads as academics take on additional work to make themselves more indispensable in the hope of contract renewals or tenure offers.[31] In such contexts, academics sympathetic to a decolonial politics may simply have insufficient time to develop corresponding research and pedagogy. Indeed, many respondents highlighted these constraints as key obstacles to decolonising their academic praxis.[32]

[25] Bob Jessop, 'Varieties of academic capitalism and entrepreneurial universities: On past research and three thought experiments', *Higher Education*, 73:6 (2017), pp. 853–70; Tobias Schulze-Cleven, Tilman Reitz, Jens Maesse, and Johannes Angermuller, 'The new political economy of higher education: Between distributional conflicts and discursive stratification', *Higher Education*, 73:6 (2017), pp. 795–812. Po King Choi, '"Weep for Chinese university": A case study of English hegemony and academic capitalism in higher education in Hong Kong', *Journal of Education Policy*, 25:2 (2010), pp. 233–25; Fonseca, 'Global IR and Western dominance'.

[26] Kamola, 'IR, the critic and the world', p. 261.

[27] Riyad A. Shahjahan and Clara Morgan, 'Global competition, coloniality, and the geopolitics of knowledge in higher education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37:1 (2016), pp. 92–109 (p. 103).

[28] R01.

[29] R02.

[30] Tickner, 'The unequal profession', p. 350.

[31] Thomas Allmer, 'Precarious, always-on and flexible: A case study of academics as information workers', *European Journal of Communication*, 33:4 (2018), pp. 381–95. Tickner, 'The unequal profession'.

[32] R03; R04.

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In many instances, scholars who enact more critical agendas are able to do so either because their institution had given them the explicit directive to do so, or because they have a tenured position: 'Now I've got a certain position in the university, I'm sure they're not going to fire me, and that's the reason why I can say what I'm thinking now. But unless you get it, it's quite difficult.'[33] Many respondents also highlighted how language barriers affect knowledge dissemination, with access to translated material often lacking or unavailable, thereby hindering diversifying and decolonising agendas.[34] Furthermore, the very idea of a sabbatical is uncommon in many countries: 'Output and productivity often are measured by physically being on campus as opposed to conducting off-campus fieldwork, data collection, and archival research. The prevailing perception is that off-campus research should be done in your free time.'[35]

Academics working on less mainstream areas also often feel excluded or marginalised by funding schemes and research grant calls. In a highly competitive grant environment, research projects are regularly modified or made more mainstream to match funders' requirements and gain access to available funds.[36] Particularly for academics with scarce local resources, this creates a dependency on the priorities of grants and foreign donors, which in turn shapes the parameters and direction of knowledge production. One respondent explained, 'most of the people that are reviewing you and your work are actually mainstream people. They don't get why you should be critical of these things.'[37] Another respondent spoke about needing to 'be more tactical as an academic' by framing their work in more policy-relevant terms for funding purposes while simultaneously trying to integrate their own passions for critical theory-driven research.[38]

Finally, two broader materially driven processes pose significant challenges to decolonising IR. First, the internationalisation of neoliberal academia has begun to co-opt emancipatory decolonial discourses, whereby marketised universities increasingly rely on precarious and often racialised labour while simultaneously incorporating the language of decolonisation into promotional materials aiming at attracting high-fee-paying international students. Rao demonstrates that decolonial initiatives based on the tokenistic inclusion of 'minority racialised voices' to appeal to new markets in a neoliberal higher education environment are unable to overturn entrenched knowledge hierarchies and 'may also end up leaving intact the structures of racism and whiteness that they purport to attack'.[39] Second, as we discuss in the 'political context' section below, universities in countries advancing the 'statification' of knowledge can be threatened by a fully decolonial agenda that would force them to acknowledge their own state's marginalised minorities.[40] Consequently, critical scholarship from the Global North is rarely translated, and government funding is channelled towards more nationalistic agendas.[41]

Spatial context

Spatiality can be defined as 'the socially produced geographical organization of society, shaping material conditions of life, power knowledge, and subjectivities'.[42] Interrogating the impact of geography on knowledge production is crucial as 'it is nearly impossible to understand academic

[33] R01.

[34] R05; R06; R07.

[35] Joseph J. Kaminski, 'Succeeding as a Western academic working at a newer foundation university in a developing country', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 53:3 (2020), pp. 532–36 (p. 533); see also Fonseca, 'Global IR and Western dominance', pp. 56–7.

[36] Allmer, 'Precarious, always-on and flexible'; Fabrice Jaumont, *Unequal Partners: American Foundations and Higher Education Development in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 134.

[37] R03.

[38] R08.

[39] Rahul Rao, 'Neoliberal antiracism and the British university', *Radical Philosophy*, 2.8 (2020), pp. 47–54. See also Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

[40] Loke and Owen, 'Mapping practices and spatiality in IR knowledge production'.

[41] R21; R22.

[42] Helga Leitner and Eric Sheppard, 'The spatiality of contentious politics: More than a politics of scale', in Roger Kiel and Rianne Mahon (eds), *Leviathan Undone? Towards a Political Economy of Scale* (Vancouver: UBC, 2009), pp. 231–46 (p. 245).

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creation without such considerations of place'.[43] One respondent reflected: 'I did my graduate work in Germany and we didn't read any non-Western IR theory. This was not a thing, right, that we did at graduate school. So I've only become aware of it and used it because I've been teaching outside of the Western world.'[44] A spatial approach must nevertheless recognise that space is socially constructed, that materiality and spatiality are explicitly intertwined, and that spatial arrangements of power can be conceived in horizonal terms, through networks and flows, and in vertical terms capturing stratification and hierarchy across (and within) local, national, and global levels.[45] Importantly,

> it is never the spatial form that acts, but rather social actors who, embedded in particular (multidimensional) spatial forms and making use of particular (multidimensional) spatial forms, act … Thus, in order to define criteria for the relevance of (a specific form of) spatiality, we need to start, both in our theoretical endeavors as well as in political practice, from concrete social processes and practices rather than reifying spatial dimensions.[46]

Accordingly, existing works have sought to problematise 'Western core/non-Western periphery' framings[47] and explore how geo-epistemology impacts academic research and knowledge production.[48] Our intention is not to rehash such debates here, but to highlight instead three aspects of spatiality that have thus far received less discussion in the literature.

The first focuses on the intersection of spatiality and materiality. Academic mobility is often not accessible to many scholars from the Global South, who are subject to lengthy visa processing and racialised freedom of movement limitations.[49] At the same time, migrant academics from the Global South to the Global North 'may feel more like knowledge workers than knowledge producers, constrained to absorb the local ways of (re)producing knowledge instead of actively contributing to creating it'.[50] This spatial–material nexus also reinforces the above-mentioned point on research grants. A Nigeria-based respondent stated that 'one of the constraints that Africans have is dependence on foreign funding. If you have an idea and you want to popularise it by means of a conference, you are not likely to get support from within. And if the idea does not resonate with foreign funders, the idea is going to die.'[51] This raises important questions as to whether foreign funding reinforces particular Western hegemonic models in Africa. As Jaumont demonstrates, although US foundation funding was crucial in developing Africa's higher education sector, these grants to African institutions favoured previous English-language-dominated British colonies. While understandable from a network and capacity-building perspective, this also created resource inequalities across the continent, with Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone countries at a disadvantage in their attempts to attract foundation funding.[52]

[43] Tickner, 'The unequal profession', p. 351.

[44] R09.

[45] Daniel Lambach, 'Space, scale, and global politics: Towards a critical approach to space in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 48:2 (2022), pp. 282–300; Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner and Martin Jones, 'Theorizing sociospatial relations', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26:3 (2008), pp. 389–401; Hanne Tange and Sharon Millar, 'Opening the mind? Geographies of knowledge and curricular practices', *Higher Education*, 72:5 (2016), pp. 573–87 (p. 574).

[46] Margit Mayer, 'To what end do we theorize socio-spatial relations?', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26:3 (2008), pp. 414–19 (p. 416).

[47] Kristensen, 'Revisiting the "American social science"'; Loke and Owen, 'Mapping practices and spatiality in IR knowledge production'.

[48] John Agnew, 'Know-where: Geographies of knowledge of world politics', *International Political Sociology*, 1:2 (2007), pp. 138–48; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 'Who publishes where?'.

[49] Louise Morley, Nafsika Alexiadou, Stela Garaz, José González-Monteagudo, and Marius Taba, 'Internationalisation and migrant academics: The hidden narratives of mobility', *Higher Education* 76 (XXXX), pp. 537–54 (p. 546).

[50] Ibid., p. 550.

[51] R10.

[52] Jaumont, *Unequal Partners*, p. 37.

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The second aspect relates to the branch campuses that many Western universities have established in non-Western countries. More research is needed to examine exactly how much central control Western universities have over their international branch campuses (IBCs), and the opportunities available for local knowledge production and circulation.[53] In many instances, the 'replication of the academic culture and societal practices of the home campus serve to extend the institutional dominance of the ways of thinking, teaching, and learning created on the Western-based home campus and, in turn, reinforce the knowledge deemed to be important'.[54] Such linear exportation and emulation feeds into the geopolitics of knowledge production. There are, however, avenues for localisation and feedback mechanisms. As one respondent from a branch campus in Malaysia stated, the teaching units and syllabi were initially imported from the Western-based home institution. Over time, however, the content was modified to adapt to the local context.[55] In this regard, 'IBCs do in practice turn into hybrid forms of home-nation/host-nation institutions, to the point where they amalgamate (in place) knowledge from either place, and local knowledge from "there" might eventually be channelled back to the "home institution" via faculty and student circulation.'[56]

The third relates to spatial hierarchies within states. Existing works on spatiality and knowledge production practices largely examine how knowledge is produced and disseminated across national borders. Yet as Turton highlights, there is the need 'to critically assess and challenge epistemic hierarchies *within* states not just between them'.[57] This reveals sites of disciplinary power within the national political context, which we discuss below. In the Philippines, power centres remain concentrated in the metropole of Manila City and the wider National Capital Region, with the Philippines International Studies Organization (PHISO) being viewed by the older generation of Filipino scholars as an 'indie' organisation because it operates outside of the three big national universities.[58]

Several of our respondents referred to such spatially organised disciplinary centres of power. One Japan-based scholar spoke of the expected role performance and knowledge production practices of elite Japanese universities:

> as long as Tokyo University and Kyoto University are a factory for bureaucrats then you're supposed to teach in a particular way and if you get into that system and you find yourself in a particular place in the hierarchy then you have to perform it. And if you perform a particular role for a long time then your subjectivity itself becomes synchronised to that role.[59]

In this context, decolonising may mean dismantling epistemic hierarchies spatially organised around a metropolitan core. As one India-based respondent expressed, creating centres of knowledge in what are typically viewed as the national periphery will offer 'a different way of dealing with issues, a different way of seeing things' than a Delhi-centric perspective.[60] Other respondents emphasised the uniqueness of the institutions in which they were based: more critically driven, but as the minority in the national context.[61]

[53] Jason E. Lane, 'Creating embassies of knowledge: Do international branch campuses mitigate or facilitate the evolution of International Relations?', *International Studies Review*, 18:2 (2016), pp. 353–58 (p. 356).

[54] Ibid., p. 357.

[55] R11.

[56] Lane, 'Creating embassies of knowledge', p. 358.

[57] Helen Louise Turton, 'Locating a multifaceted and stratified disciplinary "core"', *All Azimuth*, 9 (2020), pp. 177–209 (p. 192). Emphasis in original.

[58] Nassef Manabilang Adiong, 'The irony of systemic racism in the Global South academy: How "othering" perpetuates the Western colonisation of knowledge', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 50:1 (2021), pp. 122–5.

[59] R01.

[60] R12.

[61] R01; R13.

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Disciplinary context

In the humanities and social sciences, academic disciplines can be seen as discursive contexts. They are spaces in which academics attribute meanings, concepts, and interpretive frameworks to social phenomena, producing knowledge about those phenomena according to a prior set of recognisable standards and conventions. Foucault, in his seminal critique of disciplinary divisions, has argued that 'the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate'.[62] Likewise, Bourdieusian framings have been influential in theorising the discipline as a 'social field' characterised by struggle for influence and resources between hierarchically positioned researchers.[63] Jones highlights the importance of disciplines in shaping how colleagues act, surmising that 'the disciplinary epistemology, disciplinary traditions, university and departmental culture combine to create a community of practice in which much that is important is also unspoken'.[64] Disciplines regulate the content of the claims that knowledge producers make about the world, with significant consequences for scholars wishing to conduct critical or experimental research. As Weber has highlighted, 'Disciplinary IR … claims to speak for the whole of the discipline of IR because it wields sufficient power to (de)legitimate IR scholars and their work for many user communities'.[65] The discipline in which individual knowledge producers are located thus constitutes a significant context shaping practices of epistemic decolonisation.

Alejandro's observation that 'the field of IR [is] struggling to emancipate itself from other disciplines such as law and political science up to this day'[66] was confirmed in our interviews, with IR scholars noting how their marginalised position relative to other disciplines in their institutions impacted the way they taught. One Japan-based scholar revealed how IR's disciplinary position within Law gave it an orthodox flavour that severely limited more critical scholars:

> When you teach international politics, or politics in general, usually you are part of the Faculty of Law. So that means it is to produce bureaucrats, politicians, these faculties are supposed to be really close to the government, generating elites, that's what they're supposed to do … So international relations as an academic field doesn't really exist as independent.[67]

A respondent in India revealed that because IR is housed within Political Science and not considered an independent discipline, this restricted the ways in which Indian thinkers could be presented and taught: 'we teach these [Indian] thinkers, but we teach purely from a point of view of what they said. We never bring them into this debate as to what they can contribute to decentralising IR … because IR is not an independent discipline.'[68]

Several respondents emphasised how the disciplinary context affects the potential for decolonising IR, with IR departments often seen to reproduce the hegemonic narratives and universalising theoretical framings in 'classical' Eurocentric IR literature.[69] A Japan-based scholar lamented the conservative currents in IR departments, stating, 'if you want to do IR then you'll be kind of forced into that Westphalian straitjacket, you need to do mainstream IR, security studies, diplomatic

[62] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 223.

[63] Stephane Baele and Gregorio Bettiza, '"Turning" everywhere in IR: On the sociological underpinnings of the field's proliferating turns', *International Theory*, 13:2 (2021), pp. 314–40; Pierre Bourdieu, 'The peculiar history of scientific reason', *Sociological Forum*, 6:1 (1991), pp. 3–26.

[64] Anna Jones, 'Redisciplining generic attributes: The disciplinary context in focus', *Studies in Higher Education*, 34:1 (2009), pp. 85–100 (p. 94).

[65] Cynthia Weber, 'Why is there no queer international theory?', *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:1 (2015), pp. 27–51 (p. 29).

[66] Audrey Alejandro, 'Diversity for and by whom? Knowledge production and the management of diversity in International Relations', *International Politics Reviews*, 9 (2021), pp. 280–85 (p. 283).

[67] R01.

[68] R12.

[69] Sankaran Krishna, 'Race, amnesia and the education of International Relations', *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24.

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history and so on'.[70] A Singapore-based scholar nevertheless highlighted that new disciplinary sites could help foster more critical perspectives: 'this new department, it's not liberal arts, it's global liberal arts, so of course the emphasis is to get away from Western-centric views'.[71] Diverse and local perspectives could thus be prioritised with substantial bureaucratic restructuring, although this is a luxury not afforded to many critically minded researchers in conservative IR or Political Science departments. This connects the disciplinary context to the material context outlined above, since the fate of the IR discipline in specific universities can be tied to the funding decisions of institutional management.

In recent years, the relationship between the disciplines, or fields, of IR and Area Studies has been the focus of much attention.[72] Both have their roots in the imperial and Cold War activities of Western European powers, with IR frequently considered to be 'dominated by an Anglophone core'[73] and Area Studies originating from an imperial logic of modernisation and conquest.[74] Yet it is traditionally the universalising theory-building endeavour, considered the preserve of mainstream IR, that is valued over the empirical specificity considered to characterise much Area Studies scholarship, a position that Area Studies specialists often find themselves having to push back against.[75] This intersects with spatiality, since scholars of the Western 'core' more frequently have the luxury of 'Ivory Tower' theorising, compared to scholars based in the site of study who often conduct fieldwork in precarious conditions.[76] The material and temporal contexts are also important to understand the post–Cold War rapid 'de-funding [of] area studies in favour of research with a more "global" focus' in Anglo-American institutions, a trend consolidated in subsequent decades and driven by the neoliberalisation of academia discussed above.[77]

This hierarchical ordering was reflected in our interviews, with scholars working within Area Studies experiencing substantial barriers to pursuing a career in research. One Kazakhstan-based respondent stated, 'if you try to be a scholar and focus your studies on the region, then you get problems with dissemination, recognition, being accepted by journals, applying and getting funding for your scholarship'.[78] Respondents were divided on the role of Area Studies in IR knowledge production, with some appearing to reflect this hierarchy, and others arguing that this was where some of the most innovative work was being done. One Japan-based IR scholar stated that for Area Studies colleagues, 'theory is a secondary, third [concern], or, you know, out of their consciousness'.[79] Another Japan-based scholar bemoaned the orthodox nature of much Japanese IR, stating: 'It's difficult to do IR differently unless you choose to become an Area Studies specialist.'[80]

[70] R04.

[71] R02.

[72] David Szanton (ed.), *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Edith Clowes and Shelly Bromberg (eds), *Area Studies in the Global Age: Community, Place and Identity* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016); Zoran Milutinovic (ed.), *The Rebirth of Area Studies: Challenges for History, Politics and International Relations in the 21st Century* (London: IB Tauris, 2020).

[73] Katarzyna Kaczmarska and Stefanie Ortmann, 'IR theory and Area Studies: A plea for displaced knowledge about international politics', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 24 (2021), pp. 820–47 (p. 821).

[74] J. K. Gibson-Graham, 'Area Studies after post-structuralism', *Environment and Planning A*, 36 (2004), pp. 405–19 (p. 412); Ian Brown, *The School of Oriental and African Studies: Imperial Training and the Expansion of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[75] Andrea Teti, 'Bridging the gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the disciplinary politics of the Area Studies controversy', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 117–45; Kaczmarska and Ortmann, 'IR theory and Area Studies'; Nick Cheeseman, 'Unbound comparison', in Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith (eds), *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 64–83.

[76] Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, 'Introduction', in Masao Miyoshi, Harry Harootunian, and Rey Chow (eds), *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 1–18.

[77] Isaac Kamola, 'US universities and the production of the global imaginary', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16 (2014), pp. 515–33 (p. 527).

[78] R15.

[79] R03.

[80] R04.

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Political context

The political context of knowledge production is perhaps best exemplified in the relationship between the university and the state in a given polity: in democracies, which typically have a more pluralistic public sphere, universities have evolved to occupy a fairly autonomous position,[81] while in authoritarian states where governments limit political pluralism, there are often greater levels of political control over the knowledge that universities produce.[82] As growing numbers of studies have shown, authoritarian political contexts must be accounted for when it comes to knowledge production in the social sciences because governments of such states impose stricter boundaries on what academics can teach, research, and publish.[83] This view was reflected in our interviews; although we did not directly ask about the effects of political regimes on knowledge production, several respondents located in authoritarian contexts highlighted significant political constraints on their research and teaching, while respondents based in more democratic contexts did not raise any such constraints.

On research, respondents recounted their experience of both formal and informal limitations to knowledge production. In extreme cases, particular narratives of world events have been enshrined in domestic law, making transnational collaboration on certain sensitive political issues all but impossible. Describing the challenges of writing about Russia–Ukraine relations for a Western journal, a Russia-based respondent explained:

> If … you don't write "annexation of Crimea", but you write something like "reunification with Crimea", the editors might say no we won't accept that. But that's against the Russian legislation. If you write something about the annexation of Crimea, you can be prosecuted.[84]

The Kremlin's tendency to legislate certain narratives of world politics has increased with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine: laws have been introduced intended to prevent references to the Russian 'invasion of' or 'war in' Ukraine, requiring instead that it be referred to as a 'special military operation'. If a Russia-based academic chooses to write on the invasion of 24 February 2022, they could face criminal proceedings.[85]

Others noted how the requirement to refrain from excessive criticism of the national government is ingrained in scholarly mentalities and everyday practices of knowledge production (*doxa*). An Uzbekistan-based scholar lamented: 'This is one aspect of our reality. Loyalty. You cannot criticise harshly. You can express modest criticism, not addressed to the higher authorities, [and] you can raise some problems, mention some social issues probably, even corruption, whatever, but not touching important VIPs, let's say.'[86] While this type of knowledge, or know-how, is not necessarily enshrined in legislation, it is embedded in the practices of self-censorship that scholars based in dictatorships or authoritarian regimes enact as a daily survival mechanism. However, this respondent went on to criticise the research culture in Uzbekistan, stating, 'If you are afraid, if you are not free in your research activity then you will not be able to produce a strong product, a scientific product.'[87]

[81] Henry Reichman, *Understanding Academic Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021).

[82] Liviu Matei, 'Academic freedom, university autonomy and democracy's future in Europe', in Sjur Bergan, Tony Gallagher, and Ira Harkavy (eds), *Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Future of Democracy* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishers, 2020), pp. 29–40; Zha Qiang and Ruth Hayhoe, 'The "Beijing Consensus" and the Chinese model of university', *Frontiers of Education in China*, 9:1 (2014), pp. 42–62.

[83] Kaczmarska, *Making Global Knowledge in Local Contexts*; Catherine Owen, 'The "internationalisation agenda" and the rise of the Chinese university: Towards the inevitable erosion of academic freedom?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 22:2 (2020), pp. 238–55; Elizabeth Perry, 'Educated acquiescence: How academia sustains authoritarianism in China', *Theory and Society*, 49 (2020), pp. 1–22.

[84] R16.

[85] Margarita Zavadskaya and Theodore Gerber, 'Rise and fall: Social science in Russia before and after the war', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 39: 1–2 (2023), pp. 108–20.

[86] R17.

[87] R17.

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Concern about transgressing the state's limitations on knowledge production also permeates teaching. One Egypt-based scholar recounted the following episode:

> I did a project in my Intro to IR class in which they were supposed to set up a blog … I would give them an article that described some recent political event and they were supposed to use the theories that we were learning about to make sense of it and develop an opinion about it. And I did it and it was fine, but some of my colleagues warned me that getting students to publish political opinion pieces on the public internet could be very dangerous for them. I never gave them anything about Egypt, not even the Middle East. We could criticise what's going on in Hong Kong for instance, or we could talk about protests in Chile, but still, I was told, it's probably OK, but maybe not. So after the semester was over and I put in the grades, I deleted all their blogs.[88]

As mentioned above, in some authoritarian states, decolonising IR has become bound up with the stratification of knowledge production and development of a 'national school of thought'.[89] In part, this is because non-Western knowledge producing cores have imperial tendencies themselves;[90] creating a national school of thought therefore addresses Western epistemological domination without requiring that such states reflexively address their own hegemonic knowledge production practices. One China-based respondent indicated that this project had also reached Area Studies. He stated:

> I was more recently both very excited but also concerned with whether there would be a global knowledge community about, for example, Central Asia. Or do we have nationally bounded research communities, with their own approaches, concepts, vocabulary to study other parts of the world? Is there a Chinese School of Central Asian Studies or a Chinese School of Russian Studies? Should there be? There was actually some discussion on that in my more Russia-focused scholarly communities. Oh, Western studies of Russia is full of bias, too much dominated by, for example, democratisation, too much dominated by regime type vocabulary, right?[91]

Respondents based in democracies were less likely to mention the political regime as shaping the knowledge they produced. Indeed, it seemed that respondents in democracies had more freedom overall to advance decolonial and critical scholarship. However, other works have noted that knowledge production is also limited, albeit more subtly, in neoliberal universities located in democracies, through the reshaping of research in response to financial incentives and labour market requirements.[92] Although 'red lines' demarcating the limits of what may be studied do not exist in the same way, staff redundancies and the closure of 'economically unviable' departments – predominantly in the humanities, which are more likely to adopt decolonial praxis – demonstrate the prioritisation of technical, skills-based, and 'policy-relevant' knowledge over critical, interpretive, and reflexive knowledge.[93]

[88] R09.

[89] See Qin Yaqing, 'Why is there no Chinese International Relations theory?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7 (2007), pp. 313–40; Andrei Tsygankov and Pavel Tsygankov, 'National ideology and IR theory: Three incarnations of the "Russian idea"', *European Journal of International Relations*, 16:4 (2010), pp. 663–86; Rosa Vasilaki, 'Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and prospects in post-Western IR theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 41:3 (2012), pp. 3–22.

[90] Nitasha Kaul, 'China: Xinjiang: India: Kashmir', *Made in China Journal*, 5:2 (2020). Available at: https://madeinchinajournal.com/2020/10/05/china-xinjiang-india-kashmir/.

[91] R18.

[92] Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); James E. Côté and Anton Allahar, *Lowering Higher Education: The Rise of Corporate Universities and the Fall of Liberal Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[93] Anna Traianou, 'The erosion of academic freedom in UK higher education', *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, 15 (2015), pp. 39–15.

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Embodied context

Embodied context refers to the ways in which our physicality shapes our interpretations of the world, in terms of the bodies we inhabit and the meanings inscribed to the specific attributes and abilities, and in the geographical and historical location of those bodies. This section focuses on the first two of these, that is, the way in which our bodies are inscribed with social meanings around sex, ethnicity, and age, and the ways in which our interlocutors interact with those meanings.

This was first acknowledged and elaborated by decolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who powerfully demonstrated how the diverse identities and experiences of 'Third World women' had been homogenised and stereotyped in Western feminist writings.[94] Several years later, Donna Haraway's seminal concept of 'situated knowledge' challenged the idea of disembodied objectivism by 'reclaim[ing] the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere'.[95] This idea was developed through feminist standpoint theory, which posits that 'knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced'.[96] Summarising the way in which embodiment affects knowledge production, one respondent stated, 'Part of knowledge and knowledge production is experience. My experience is different from yours, not because you are female only, but because we have lived in a different place, maybe a different class. My different context has affected the way I see things.'[97]

Numerous respondents highlighted experiences of how their bodies provided them with certain constraints and opportunities within their academic praxis, most of which were articulated along the lines of ethnicity. On the first, scholars reported numerous ways in which their ethnicity affected their knowledge production practices. For instance, an audience or interlocutor might assume certain expertise due to one's ethnicity. A Japan-based respondent explained:

> my name is [Japanese name omitted for anonymity] so when I go to China, people often say 'you Japanese do this and your Japanese perspective … what is your Japanese perspective about China?' And to be honest, I actually get really offended because I know less about Japan than China … so judging [by one's] name is not a great way. So decolonising really needs to come from the context.[98]

This illustrates how social meanings are inscribed onto ethnic identities, generating assumptions, expectations, and biases about the types of knowledge or research expertise one should have.[99]

Embodiment and materiality are also closely linked, concentrating power and resources into the hands of the privileged. Respondents noted the visibility of embodied hierarchies within their own institutions, with higher pay packages and greater levels of authority accorded to 'international' scholars in their departments. A Kazakhstan-based scholar stated:

> Yes, I think we [local scholars] are a very different class of people as we are recognised by the university … there's the international type of contract and the local type of contract. Yes, and this kind of discrimination not only starts at the point where you sign a contract but it continues when you're voicing your opinion in a board meeting, a department meeting, or

[94] Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes'.

[95] Haraway, 'Situated knowledges', p. 581.

[96] Susan Hekman, 'Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22:2 (1997), pp. 341–65 (p. 342).

[97] R06.

[98] R19.

[99] Elena B. Stavrevska, Sladjana Lazic, Vjosa Musliu, et al., 'Of love and frustration as post-Yugoslav women scholars: Learning and unlearning the coloniality of IR in the context of Global North academia', *International Political Sociology*, 17:2 (2023), pp. 1–20.

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> whether you're trying to introduce courses that you think are as good as your colleagues', and so on.[100]

Several respondents reported that higher salaries and greater benefits are offered to 'international' scholars in order to attract them to institutions in locations they might not otherwise consider.[101]

Similarly, respondents noted the automatic privileges conferred specifically to white scholars in different locales. As one Japan-based scholar explained:

> These days there are more and more universities. They offer global studies and they teach the course mostly in English. They also hired foreign faculty members, mostly Westerners I think because that fit into a kind of Japanese image about the foreign … if you talk about foreigners … usually the image that pops up in their mind is the typical kind of Caucasian with blonde hair, blue eyes … That's really the typical image they have. So it actually makes it easier for some Western scholars, Western and Caucasian background scholars to find academic jobs in Japan.[102]

This embodied hierarchy was echoed by a Kazakhstan-based scholar who reflected that 'If people are looking for an advisor for their thesis on a Masters programme and if they look at the faculty website and they see a local and an international professor, they will in most cases prefer an international professor.'[103] This unequal treatment between local and foreign – specifically Western – academics highlights the material power conferred to some bodies and denied to others, even within the same institutions.

While many universities have recognised such inequalities and are seeking to address it by introducing diversity statements or calling for greater diversity in hiring and teaching practices, these are often performative and do not equate to a fundamental transformation of power and social hierarchies.[104] Women, for instance, continue to feel that the system is biased against them, especially in obtaining tenure-track positions and appointments to leadership roles.[105] One China-based respondent evaluated the Chinese IR community, stating that 'it's an extremely male-dominated field, extremely, extremely male-dominated field'. When asked to elaborate, he explained: 'Because IR like, to some extent, Political Science is a subject heavily influenced and shaped by power and it studies power, and that gender balance to some extent reflects the power distribution of a traditional feudal society or discipline. It just replicates the logic of wider power structures.'[106]

Temporal context

The concept of time has gained prominence in IR in recent years.[107] Temporal framings of world politics are captured when references are made to historicising, predicting, evolution, linearity, stagnation, cycles, dynamism, or contingency. Time has an ordering function – what becomes hegemonic, 'universal', habituated, or 'legitimate' is constructed and perpetuated over time. Yet time, and timing, is ultimately positional: '*every* temporal reference – whether dominant or dissident, general or idiosyncratic – reflects a position and a will to time that privileges *and*

[100] R15.
[101] R20; R15.
[102] R04.
[103] R15.
[104] Thakur, 'Navigating multiple identities', pp. 16–17.
[105] Christina Fattore, 'Nevertheless, she persisted: Women's experiences and perceptions within the International Studies Association', *International Studies Perspectives*, 20:1 (2019), pp. 46–62.
[106] R21.
[107] Andrew R. Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Kimberley Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

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marginalizes, elevates *and* subordinates agents and processes at the same "time"'.[108] In other words, the extent to which time is perceived to drive logics of change and continuity is often dependent on one's positionality. The status quo, for instance, may reflect long-term stability to some, or stagnation to others; likewise, temporal ruptures may represent disorder or the potential for transformative change depending on how one views them.

Time plays a fundamental role in maintaining coloniality and racialised hierarchies. The notion of 'linear time', bound up in civilising processes, notions of development, and 'universal' progress, juxtaposes modern Europe and 'the West', as encapsulating the present and the future, against an un(der)developed non-West.[109] In this context, the 'rise of the rest' or the shift to the East are perceived as challenges to, or indeed a crisis of, the liberal international order. These spatial-temporal hierarchies have shaped disciplinary boundaries and knowledge production practices into what constitutes the 'international', with Politics and International Relations disciplines often focused on studying the West, and the non-West largely relegated to Area Studies.[110] As Capan writes, 'The non-west is represented in a time other than the present, as not yet caught up with the "theoretical" level of the "West". This approach in many ways reproduces the old modernisation narrative of the need for Third World states to catch up to the West.'[111]

Temporality nevertheless represents opportunities for confronting the past, envisioning different and alternative futures, and examining resistance, transformation, and change across different geo-historical settings. This means viewing 'temporality as a critical site of power, epistemic disruption, and possibility'.[112] This possibility was highlighted by several respondents. When asked about receptivity towards introducing Japanese concepts and approaches, one respondent said: 'Particularly in this very strong gatekeeping academic subject, it takes time, it definitely takes time, but just keep going and we might see something new.'[113]

Numerous respondents also spoke explicitly in generational terms, noting that the older generation of scholars was more likely to cling to traditional paradigms while decolonial and critical agendas were more likely to be advanced by younger scholars. One Palestine-based scholar remarked: 'we have this kind of older generation from twenty, thirty years ago, and they keep lecturing. They come to the class and they want to lecture on something they already know … so there's a lack of updating their material.'[114] Another responded: 'Many of the older generation scholars have retired … and are now succeeded by my generation and the younger generation who are more familiar with a variety of different knowledge production and methodological practices. We have actually a greater space now in Indonesia to develop Global IR or other discourses.'[115]

There are important links to materiality, with the most prominent being the 'tenure clock'. 'Tenure is such a make-or-break moment', a Singapore-based respondent remarked, 'that you really have to please the field in a certain way prior to tenure, and after that you can do what you like.'[116] Unsurprisingly, having to juggle competing time pressures and the constraints they impose on

[108]Andrew R. Hom, 'Timing is everything: Toward a better understanding of time and international politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:1 (2018), pp. 69–79 (p. 73). Emphasis in original.

[109]Paulo Chamon, 'Turning temporal: A discourse of time in IR', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46:3 (2018), pp. 396–420; Musab Younis, 'Race, the world and time: Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia (1914–1945)', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46:3 (2018), pp. 352–70.

[110]David C. Kang and Alex Yu-Ting Lin, 'US bias in the study of Asian security: Using Europe to study Asia', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 4:3 (2019), pp. 393–401.

[111]Zeynep Gulsah Capan, 'TimeSpace of the "international?"', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 36:6 (2022), pp. 811–25 (p. 816).

[112]Matthew Houdek and Kendall R. Phillips, 'Rhetoric and the temporal turn: Race, gender, temporalities', *Women's Studies in Communication*, 43:4 (2020), pp. 369–83 (p. 372); Narendran Kumarakulasingam (ed.), 'Decolonial Temporalities: Plural Pasts, Irreducible Presents, and Open Futures', special issue of *Contexto Internacional*, 38:3 (2016), pp. 755–939.

[113]R01.

[114]R06.

[115]R08; also R12.

[116]R13.

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developing critical innovative research was raised by many respondents: 'We already have so many demands on our time.'[117]

Temporality is also deeply entangled with political contexts, with state-driven agendas often providing the impetus to develop indigenous approaches. One Indonesia-based scholar remarked: 'The momentum is ripe these days because some of us in Indonesia are encouraged by the current Joko Widodo government to … help the local to become global.'[118]

A China-based scholar spoke about the relationship between the impact of China's rising power on the international system and resulting knowledge production practices: 'what you see, probably starting early 21st century, was a very conscious move within the field (in China) to get rid of this pure importation of US IR … and then to seek the possibility of establishing more of a genuinely indigenously produced knowledge body, based on China's experience, on China's changing status in the international system.'[119] This same scholar nevertheless highlighted important shifts in recent years towards a more nationalist orientation, with greater emphasis now to develop 'a China-based, indigenous academic field, indigenous disciplines, indigenous knowledge-producing system'.[120] In this context, material incentives to publish in internationally recognised journals or collaborate with international scholars are shrinking over time:

> the overall mood is against collaboration with foreign institutions or foreign scholars. There is an air of securitisation of research, securitisation of academic outreach. So increasing institutional barriers to have, for example an international conference, in China is very complicated to get approval. You need to submit approval more and more in advance. It was three months in advance, then it was six months in advance, now it's one year in advance to get approval. To use funding with an international collaborator, it's just too much time, too time-consuming to work with this system, right, if you're working with international collaborators, or foreign institutions.[121]

Towards a global yet situated decolonial IR

The contexts elaborated above do not appear in isolation. Instead, they intertwine and reinforce one another, clustering together and concentrating their effects. Materiality, in particular, compounds other contexts. For instance, privileges accorded in spatial, embodied, and temporal contexts may boost access to material resources. Grosfoguel has powerfully illustrated the link between racialised hierarchies and 'the ceaseless accumulation of capital [which] is affected by, integrated to, constitutive of, and constituted by those hierarchies'.[122] The financialisation of the Anglo-American academy and the replication of this model across parts of the Global South has intensified these trends. However, it is important not to fall into deterministic assumptions about specific regions, regimes, bodies, or disciplines. In contrast to expectations of a 'geo-cultural IR', with academics from particular geographical areas producing similar knowledge and reflecting shared perspectives, we may instead find an IR that is similar everywhere through the reproduction of state-centric narratives, academic ethnocentrism, and the very problems that diversification attempts seek to address.[123] Therefore, the effects of contextual layering are complex and should not be used as a predictive tool. Rather, we intend them to inform an awareness of the complexity of situated knowledges, to aid understanding of why decolonial approaches may gain traction in some locations and

[117] R13; also R03; R04.
[118] R08.
[119] R21.
[120] R21.
[121] R21.
[122] Ramón Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy: transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1:1 (2011), pp. 1–37 (p. 19).
[123] Alejandro, 'Diversity for and by whom?'.

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not in others, and to identify and redress imperial legacies and inherited power imbalances in global knowledge production.

What does the significance of contexts in shaping knowledge claims mean for global knowledge production in IR? Given the variety of contexts elaborated above, and considering the degree to which they constrain and shape academic practices in different institutional sites across the globe, can knowledge about 'the international' be universal? Should it be? Does the importance of context illustrated above suggest that we must all become relativists now? Indeed, universalism and imperialism have long been assumed to walk hand in hand, providing the theoretical underpinnings of orthodox conceptions of world politics. We contend that a recognition of context does not necessarily mean that scholars exist in discrete and incommensurable knowledge production sites; indeed, a commitment to a global decolonial project implies some level of universalism, conceived as a praxis of boundary-crossing solidarity. As Khader argues, 'A parochial morality is not enough in a world characterized, not just by frequent cross-cultural interaction, but also by cross-border exercises of power.'[124] She continues, following Zerilli,[125] that non-Western ideas must have the capacity to transcend their context and become legible to the coloniser, otherwise the harms experienced by Western imperialism cannot be transnationally articulated. The initial task for critical scholars operating in different contexts, then, is to locate shared sources of epistemic injustice and acknowledge their effects on our ontologies and epistemic practices.

In this spirit, we return to what a contextually informed approach to decolonising IR might look like. We have argued that a global decolonial endeavour must engage with the following dimensions of power in knowledge production: first, the various ways in which power is both exercised and experienced; second the tools, opportunities, and constraints that derive from the positionality of the actor(s) wishing to decolonise; and, third, the material and ideational structures that elevate certain narratives over others. The production of knowledge is a deeply political act. Interrogating this politics entails a recognition that knowledge is shaped by and produced in specific contexts and necessitates reflection on how these contexts privilege the work of some scholars and marginalise others. Across our six contexts, power inequalities manifest differently, providing particular scholars with freedoms and opportunities, while denying them to others. Material contexts enable those with more resources the freedom to adopt critical agendas; spatial contexts map hierarchies both between and within states; disciplinary contexts order and condition the flavour of IR knowledge; political contexts govern the boundaries of knowledge acceptable to those in positions of authority; embodied contexts privilege the voices of certain people over others; and temporal contexts structure logics of change and continuity. The possibility for transformation begins with a recognition of the lived experiences of marginalised or disadvantaged scholars within and across each context.

Conclusion

Recent developments in IR reflect a broader disciplinary disposition to dismantle entrenched knowledge production hierarchies, challenging its deep-rooted Western-centricity. We nevertheless argue that critical interrogation of dominant knowledge production practices must be context-specific, since epistemic imperialism is practised and experienced – and therefore must be confronted and overcome – differently in different geographical, epistemological, and ontological sites. In other words, the global project of decolonising IR requires analysis that is grounded in contextual particularities.

In doing so, this article contributes to existing research on IR epistemic practices in two ways, one theoretical and one practical. First, it advances a deeper investigation into the role of contexts in the production of knowledge. As highlighted above, although multiple studies on

[124]Serene Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 28.

[125]Linda Zerilli, 'Towards a feminist theory of judgement', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34:2 (2009), pp. 295–317.

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various dimensions of context exist, these are often conducted independently. By mapping out six interrelated contexts, this article constitutes a transdisciplinary and bridge-building study into how material, spatial, disciplinary, political, embodied, and temporal contexts incentivise, constrain, and shape knowledge production practices in IR. Developing this novel framework opens up a broader research agenda to further interrogate the ways in which different contexts interact to impact how IR knowledge is produced. It mounts a challenge to any universalising ontology of 'the international' and suggests that a critical examination of the various contexts in which scholars are embedded may help us build bridges between different conceptions of world politics.

Second, this paper contains a practical, real-world import. We have presented a framework that enables a deeper understanding of how multiple colonialities operate in and through entangled contexts, and therefore of how dominant hierarchies can be challenged. Such investigations in turn aid the development of concrete approaches to decolonise IR. Whilst decolonising IR as a political project requires the ability to see beyond one's own context, it does not necessitate a singular decolonial 'toolkit' or set of practices. Rather, decolonising IR as an emancipatory epistemic framework must be located within the context-specific environments of scholars. A global decolonial project is possible, and indeed necessary, but we must be wary of a universalising approach. We have elaborated six important contexts that affect decolonising IR and have illustrated the ways in which they interact through the lived experiences of IR scholars, thereby responding to wider calls for more grounded empirical analysis. Paying attention to how hierarchies are (re)produced in and through (the interaction of) these six contexts helps us uncover spaces for manoeuvrability, resistance, solidarity, and transformation.

Cited interviews

Code	Country	Date
R01	Japan	4 July 2019 (a)
R02	Singapore	27 June 2019
R03	Japan	12 December 2019
R04	Japan	5 July 2019
R05	China	17 June 2019
R06	Palestine	28 October 2019
R07	Nigeria	13 July 2019 (a)
R08	Indonesia	20 September 2022
R09	Egypt	27 November 2019
R10	Nigeria	13 July 2019 (b)
R11	Malaysia	5 July 2019
R12	India	4 July 2019
R13	Singapore	5 July 2019
R14	Russia	29 October 2019
R15	Kazakhstan	28 June 2019
R16	Russia	5 March 2020
R17	Uzbekistan	6 March 2020
R18	Russia	3 December 2019
R19	Japan	4 July 2019 (b)
R20	Kazakhstan	8 August 2022
R21	China	12 September 2022
R22	China	27 September 2022

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