

Situating the Amazon in World Politics

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The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While Members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences—anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how, and under what conditions, the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

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Situating the Amazon in World Politics

In popular discourse, as well as in my discipline of International Relations, the Amazon is not exactly the first place one looks for global politics. It exists in the popular imagination as a land without history, wild and remote. In this depiction of the Amazon there are pristine rainforests inhabited by isolated tribes in need of preservation from global forces. Many accounts lead readers to imagine adventurers navigating legendary uncharted waters in search of El Dorado, failing to realize that Amazon rivers were subject to systematic human manipulation. They portray it as a pure nature capable of containing global warming, rarely remembering that Amazon rubber enabled the automobile revolution fueling today's climate crisis in the first place. There is a profound gap between what is (un)told about the Amazon and the international interactions at play on the ground.

The Amazon seems to offer the potential to be endlessly discovered. When conceptualized, it tends to be as a uniform, unified entity, a frontier of civilization. Amazonia is commonly appraised at the margins of world politics as some apolitical Eden that resists external forces of modernization (Slater 2002; Hutchins and Wilson 2010). The Euro-centric gaze has continuously identified Amazonia as its quintessential *other*, starting with its naming. The word Amazon refers to a mythical people of female warriors living at the edge of the known world who subverted Greek rules (especially with regards to men and marriage). These untamed women living outside Greek civilization were said to cut off their right breast to be more effective in battle.¹ They embody a barbaric otherness to be conquered and civilized, and a foil for cultured (European) society. Much of the West still imagines Amazonia as "wild" despite abundant geo-archeological evidence that it is a garden in which forests and rivers have been efficiently managed for millennia (Raffles 2002; Mann 2005).² Popular and scholarly portrayals of the region focus on its ecological exuberance rather than its dynamic political history (Adams et al 2006; Hecht 2013). When politics reach the Amazon, it tends to be from ecological perspectives that emphasize how external powers use (and abuse) its natural resources. The Amazon is not perceived as a place to study International Relations because it is imagined outside the modern state.

The paradox is that Amazon experiences are, in fact, deeply interconnected with global dynamics. Moreover, although the name confers a singular entity, it is in fact a multinational region that contains many variations, a place of multiple histories. The modern world has long been influencing Amazonia, and Amazonia has, in turn, contributed much to forging what we now refer to as the global North.³ Scholars like Susanna Hecht (2013) have sought to debunk Amazon otherness, providing close-up analyses of forestry management and insurgent politics, depicting an Amazonia more ordinary than foreign, irremediably international. Overall, however, social sciences such as

anthropology have *otherized* Amazonia. The discipline of International Relations (IR), in contrast, made it invisible. The absence of Amazonia in what constitutes legitimate world politics seems to be the result of who defines political theory, from where, and for what purpose (Cox 1986) rather than serious historical considerations. Depending on where one stands, it is easy to ignore a lot of the world. IR's omission of the Amazon is similar to that of centuries of slave trade. The region was dismissed as irrelevant to world politics in the same way that the Haitian Revolution was not recognized as a critical juncture in the international history of state-making (Buck-Morss 2009). This invisibility speaks of the larger challenge of locating the non-core in scientific theory. The Amazon is not at the center, but it is constitutive of the center. IR theory on stateness has long been about *other* places, about peoples who are made absent. Although Amazonia is diverse, complex, and heterogeneous, IR's discursive representation leaves it invisible at the margins of global politics. This essay claims Amazonia as its object of study to unpack IR's disciplinary logic, a logic that is symptomatic of exclusions in other areas of social sciences, especially political science.

I work with a body of critical literature that challenges IR's state-centrism. These critiques question the discipline's fixation on Westphalian sovereignty, positivist inquiry, and entrenched imperialism (Hobson 2012; Inayatullah 2011; Jackson 2011). They use gender and race perspectives to adopt a more expansive conceptualization of the international (Tickner 2011; Henderson 2013) while wrestling with the core-periphery divide that obscures the social construction of knowledge (Tickner and Blaney 2013). My attempt to revisit IR from an Amazon perspective is inspired by these calls to pluralize IR beyond disciplinary borders. I contest IR's modernity/tradition binary as well as the nature/culture boundary that dismisses "natural" places like Amazonia to the political periphery. This neglect makes it extremely difficult to appreciate what the non-core thinks about the international. Searching for Amazon perspectives on world politics, even with regards to issues that directly affect it, such as environmental change, makes one feel like Virginia Woolf looking for women in British literature. This essay suggests that serious engagement with Amazonia might disrupt established thinking about world politics, opening up fruitful theoretical spaces. The analysis proceeds in three steps. It first identifies international dynamics at play in the Amazon through different historical moments to show how the periphery is, and has always been, entangled with the global core. It then examines the absence of the Amazon in the study of IR. Critical insights on core-periphery dynamics explore why the global South remains so marginalized in processes of knowledge production. The last section argues that it is necessary to disrupt the global division of labor in knowledge production and proposes the Amazon as a fertile location for re-conceptualizing the field of International Relations.

Worldly Amazons

The Amazon is an ecological system that covers about 40 percent of South America. It encompasses the largest water reserve and the largest rainforest in the world, boasting unrivaled biodiversity. It is also, like Europe, a historically complex and socially porous region with geopolitical borders rather tricky to define. The Amazon River basin is shared among Brazil (63%), Peru (10%), Colombia (7%), Bolivia (6%), Venezuela (6%), Guyana (3%), Suriname (2%), and Ecuador (1.5%) (Garcia 2012). French Guiana, a French territory, also owns a little piece of it (1.5%), which means that technically France has as much Amazon as Ecuador. Amazon borders are nevertheless porous, and it is often unclear where the Amazon starts or ends. People tend to identify as Amazonians or their ethnic group rather than their country of nationality. As a result, Amazonia is not a single referent, but strikingly diverse whether ecologically, politically, or ethnically. Historically complex and socially rebellious, Amazonia has persistently resisted the homogenizing presence of states (Scott 2009), while being nonetheless surprisingly influential in the political economy of state formation.

Amazon societies have a complex history that predates their encounter with Europe. The incorporation of cacao in societies across the Americas suggests the region has long practiced transnational exchanges. Originally from the upper Amazon (mostly Ecuador and Peru), cacao was domesticated by the Mayas before our era. By the eleventh century it was regularly consumed as far north as Chaco Canyon, in the US Southwest. Amazon archeology revealed domesticated landscapes. *Terra preta*, a man-made dark soil mixed with Indigenous⁴ artifacts to increase fertility, reveals anthropogenic forests throughout the Amazon (Mann 2005). As more *terra preta* is uncovered, partly due to deforestation, growing geo-archeological evidence demonstrates the existence of dense, fully sedentary populations across ecological settings from Colombia to Brazil (Rostain 2013). Settlements in pre-contact Amazonia suggest that people have been modifying their landscape for centuries (Whitehead 2003). What appeared as wilderness to Europeans was elaborated forestry that provided food, medicine, and tools to large societies. As many as one million people walked the causeways of the Beni, in eastern Bolivia, leaving waste mounds larger than Pompeii. Archeologists also found millennia-old ceramics in the lowlands, a two thousand year old “Amazonian Stonehenge” in the Caribbean Amazon, and the ruins of a three thousand year old house in the Andean foothills. At the time of the European arrival Amazonia was home to developed societies that used astronomical observatories (Hecht 2013). If Europeans who first ventured down the Amazon River described large settlements it is because the region was indeed well populated.

The Amazon is a transnational space deeply interconnected with the making of modern states. Already in the late sixteenth century European empires were forging their political, legal, and economic authority on Amazon territory. The Spanish first connected the Andean highlands to the Atlantic when Francisco de Orellana traveled down the Amazon River in 1541. European explorations flourished on the valuable tobacco trade

and the prospect of the Amazon River as a profitable (and safe) overland route to traffic Inca silver and gold across the Atlantic. Within a century, the Amazon River had become a focal point of European trade and settlements. English, Irish, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese traders and settlers were erecting fortifications on the rivers to bolster rival claims to sovereignty (Benton 2009). In the seventeenth century, the Portuguese were busy destroying Dutch forts from the Xingú to Belém, including the monopoly of the West India Company in a region that the Dutch already called New Holland.⁵ British colonies flourished into the mid-seventeenth century, with hundreds of settlers on plantations scattered along 300 miles of Amazon rivers. They charted Amazon rivers as early as 1595 and as far as Xingú (Tyacke 1980). By 1619, they had established the Amazon Company under Capt. Roger North (Wroughton 2006).⁶ These maritime enterprises on Amazonian rivers helped forge the British commercial empire. Sir Thomas Roe, in fact, created settlements on the Oyapok River in Amazonia; he later became ambassador to India (Beer 1908). The Dutch West India Company and the British Amazon Company are testimony to the imperial competition at play through trade in the region.

Amazonia became a center of territorial claims. Susanna Hecht (2013) has retraced the scramble for the Amazon because, in spite of its apparent remoteness, the Amazon is a highly cosmopolitan place at the heart of state-making. The Caribbean Amazon, which Europeans referred to as the Wild Coast, was at the intersection of a tropical “great game” between France, England, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, native Amazonians, and maroon communities, called *quilombos*. After battles for strategic trade and territorial claims on this immense *terra nullius*, Europeans developed legal (and extra-legal) mechanisms in an attempt to control native labor. Instead of transporting gold on rather difficult routes, European powers got busy kidnapping and enslaving natives.⁷ By the mid-seventeenth century, Spain, Portugal, and the Catholic Church were negotiating international trade agreements to regulate the enslavement and trafficking of native populations on the Amazon River. Jesuit missionaries oversaw the Indians and controlled most trade until the Portuguese Crown decided to lay claim to the economic bonanza and expelled them in 1759. The native slave economy in the Lower Amazon fueled international trade through the eighteenth century (Alencastro 2006).

The region was entangled with Europe both commercially and politically. Amazon ports were closer and more accessible to Portugal than ports in Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, and in some ways more interconnected with the Atlantic trade flow. Separate from Brazil, the region was directly administered by Lisbon since 1621. What is today claimed as Brazilian Amazonia was an autonomous region called Grão-Pará and Maranhão during colonial rule. Portugal only united its American colonies in 1772. Even after that, the Grão-Pará remained politically, legally and economically independent for another century. Once it gained autonomy from Lisbon, the region became first an administratively autonomous captaincy and was later ruled by regional juntas. In practice, Amazonia was fully integrated to Brazil in 1855; most of the region (since Brazil’s share is over 60%) functioned largely as an independent country until the rubber era.

It is perhaps because the region was so economically dynamic and politically autonomous that it was also rebellious. One example is the social revolt that raged through the lower Amazon from 1835 to 1840 in what is today the state of Pará. The Cabanagem rebellion revealed the strength of insurgent citizenship in the lower Amazon (Harris 2010).

African diasporas and Indigenous communities led the Cabanagem⁸ to defend autonomous lifestyles. Like other powerful rebellions of its century, such as Bahia's Sabinada (1835) or the Canudos war (1897), the Cabanagem contested political exclusion, land grabbing, and forced labor as much as centralized forms of authority. It opposed domination by the Portuguese monarchy as well as internal forms of colonialism under Brazil's newly formed empire.⁹ Similarly to Canudos, the rebellion successfully resisted the central government for years before being violently repressed.¹⁰ It shows that Amazonia was already the stage of political insurgencies in the nineteenth century.

It was the rubber boom that catapulted the Amazon most forcefully to the global forefront. International demand for rubber took off at a time when the Amazon was the world's sole supplier (Weinstein 1983).¹¹ Goodyear's discovery of vulcanization in 1839 sparked the bicycle and automobile industries, interconnecting further the European and US economies with the Amazon. As demand increased, the rubber that used to be collected by Indians was soon handled by rubber-barons who brutally enslaved local populations. By the time Hevea seeds were successfully transferred to Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, triggering the collapse of Amazonia's rubber monopoly, a violent genocide had decimated the Amazon Indigenous population and pushed survivors to nomadic lifestyles (Rivera 1924),¹² Manaus had an opera house, and Henry Ford had tried and failed to build an industrial town on a plot of rainforest twice the size of Delaware (Grandin 2009).

Although the internationalization of the Amazon during the rubber boom is relatively well known, its role in supporting the Allies during World War II is less so. The Amazon became a strategic provider of rubber for the Allies in 1942 after Japan's occupation of Southeast Asia cut off more than 90% of the global rubber supply (Wilkinson 2009). The Roosevelt Administration called for a push in rubber tapping across Amazonian rainforests, and Brazil's President Getúlio Vargas responded with a "Battle for Rubber" that shipped nearly 30,000 "rubber soldiers" from the arid northeast to rubber estates in the Amazon. The modest increase in rubber production may not have been of much significance in the final outcome of WWII. Yet this enterprise meant that North American technical advisers, Brazilian government agencies, the Roosevelt Administration, migrant rubber tappers, rubber elites, and Indigenous groups all interacted in a wartime enterprise to supply European needs in wartime. It was not the first nor the last time that global, national, and regional actors converged in the Amazon to influence world politics.

Vargas' rubber initiative is one of several monumental projects in Amazonia. The *Madeira-Mamoré* railroad was planned in the late nineteenth century and construction started in 1907. The project, one of the first large US engineering projects abroad, brought over 20,000 workers from more than 50 nationalities to build 366 kilometers of railroad at

the western borders of the Brazilian Amazon.¹³ Half a century later, Brazil's military junta inaugurated the Trans-Amazonian Highway, a 4,000 kilometer road, facilitating communication to remote areas (which a new generation of "adventurers" now "explores" on bicycles). The Amazon has also seen the development of energy projects. In Brazil, the Balbina hydroelectric plant inundated 240,000 hectares in 1989; and the current Belo Monte project is the largest of 60 hydroelectric plants planned in the Amazon. The Peruvian and Ecuadoran Amazons have been overrun by extractive oil industries since the 1970s, with China replacing the US in expanding the extractive frontier today.

This history of international interactions explains complex migration flows that inevitably diversified the population. Lincoln's 1862 plan to export freed US slaves as colonists to the Amazon fell through (Lincoln 1862). Yet Amazonia was already very African then, being home to many runaway slave communities. Almost four times as many Africans as Europeans came to the Americas, and tens of thousands of them fled inland to Indigenous territory to escape slave labor (Hecht and Mann 2012). Africans were a majority population together with the Indians, forming *quilombos* deep into Amazonia. The more European entrepreneurs, religious orders, and migrant workers settled in, the more Amazon populations diversified. Photographs of the *Madeira-Mamoré* railroad show Hindus and Ottoman Turks posing in their traditional attire against a rainforest background circa 1910. In the 1930s, Japanese emigration focused on jute agriculture (Brasil de Sá 2010). Today, Haitian immigrants flood across Brazilian borders to enter a booming construction economy. In parallel to migration inflows, many natives were killed by disease or enslaved, while others were forcibly displaced or escaped up tributaries. The Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) estimates that Indigenous peoples constitute less than 10 percent (2.7 million) of the Amazon's population today.

To put it simply, Amazonians are incredibly more diverse than the authentic naked peoples portrayed in black and white photo-reportages in *Vogue* magazine today. In the twenty-first century, Indigenous peoples who live on "intangible"¹⁴ territories are on Facebook, successfully mobilizing information technology to defend their land from intrusive development projects such as oil exploitation and hydroelectric plants. Manaus was once the place where cosmopolitan elites built an opera house to imitate Parisian lifestyle in the rainforest. Now it is an operating base for the international drug trade. The Amazon remains at the center of a global, albeit illegal, economy as one of the world's busiest routes for drug trafficking, supplying most of the cocaine on global markets. The Western world has long been influencing Amazonia, and Amazonia has in turn contributed much to forging what we now refer to as the global North.

None of this political history would be exceptional if it were not located in a place perceived to be detached from world history. Perhaps it is clear by now that there is nothing isolated or untouched about the Amazon. To the contrary, Amazonia's international relations merit attention because they are extremely complex and far-reaching. They continue to flourish today. Over the last decades, Amazon politics became more institutionalized. Governments signed the 1978 Amazon Cooperation Treaty, whereas

Indigenous peoples increasingly invoke international rights to self-determination. The region's illicit economies are also thriving and globally connected, not least with the international headquarters of drug-trafficking fueling many economies across the region. It would take a book rather than an essay to provide a fair overview of Amazonia's current international interactions. Given this history, it is surprising that the Amazon has not been explored more closely as a nexus of world politics by scholars of international relations.

Where is the Amazon in the study of world politics? Core-periphery dynamics in IR

Scholars seem to consider the Amazon irrelevant to the study of world politics. A survey of the International Studies Association (ISA) reveals that the Amazon is virtually absent from the discipline. Since 1959, the ISA is the premier organization for IR scholars. It counts over 6,000 members and managed to get a consultative status with the United Nations. The organization publishes six peer-reviewed journals that are highly praised in the field: *International Studies Quarterly* (ranked the second most influential IR journal in 2012), *International Studies Review*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Political Sociology*, and *International Interactions*. The Amazon is invisible in these six ISA publications. According to the records available online, none of the journals has ever published any article related to the Amazon. The only exception is a short book review published by the *International Studies Review* where one of the books under review was about deforestation in the Amazon. The Amazon is also invisible at ISA conferences. A review of the nearly 300 pages of annual conference programs involving nearly 1,000 participants reveals that it is virtually absent from research agendas. In 2009, there was nothing about the Amazon. The 2010, 2011, and 2012 conferences each had three individual paper presentations addressing the Amazon; the 2013 conference only two. The Amazon does not figure in ISA publications or conferences because it is not part of the conceptual map of the discipline whose central avowed concern is to understand the world. It is not invoked to explain international relations, political economy, or security paradigms. A study of citations or university courses would most likely confirm the Amazon's invisibility in the study of international relations. This absence speaks volumes. It implies that the Amazon, like other "marginal" (natural) locations, is not considered a site where world politics take place, nor does it influence global economics or determine foreign policy.

The Amazon is invisible both because it is considered a place of nature and is a territory in the global South. This invisibility indicates the (non)place of the periphery in the making of IR. Isolated critiques of US dominance in IR have recently evolved into more substantial efforts. Routledge publishing, for instance, dedicates the series *Worlding Beyond the West* to analyze how core-periphery dynamics influence knowledge production. Arlene Tickner (2013) has been particularly critical of IR's center-periphery configuration, which she says favors analytical categories and research programs that are defined by academic communities within the North while also reinforcing Northern dominance

within international practice. Yet the discipline remains starkly US-centric. A survey shows that US authors account for 58% of the assigned readings in undergraduate IR classes throughout the world—and over 70% of readings in undergraduate classes in the US (Maliniak et al. 2012). The assigned topics further highlight patterns of dominance. Realism is the most widely taught paradigm in IR (feminism only accounts for 7%); almost 60% of scholars describe their work as positivist; international security is by far the main area of research. Only 5% of PhD course material is assigned to study regions, mostly Europe.

The construction of IR knowledge is concentrated in one place. All of IR's twenty most influential authors are from the English-speaking global North; Martha Finnemore and Susan Strange are the only women ranked among IR's twenty most influential authors. Most IR scholars conduct primary research in non-native languages, except for English speakers, who tend to speak only their mother tongue. The top three-ranked IR journals are in the US (*International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Security*), and US-based authors account for 80% to 100% of articles published in any given year between 1970 and 2005 (Friedrichs and Wæver in Tickner and Wæver 2009). Authors based in Europe represent on average less than 10% in the top four IR journals, including the British-based *Review of International Studies*. The “rest of the world” is essentially invisible in all publications. What is worrisome is that US dominance is not diminishing but growing as more scholars need to publish in “internationally recognized” venues to secure job stability.

The invisibility of Amazonia, and the concomitant non-place of the periphery in IR, is symptomatic of a bigger problem across the social sciences. The analysis of participation in peer-reviewed journals and of citation patterns exposes the entrenched inequality that characterizes academic knowledge production beyond IR (Tickner 2013:632). Almost 60% of the total literature covered by the Social Sciences citation index is authored or co-authored by scholars affiliated with the United States; all of Western Europe accounts for 25%, Latin America 1% and the entire African continent for less than 1% (Keim 2008 in Tickner 2013). The construction of knowledge in the social sciences is by and large a business of the global North. As such, language functions as a key enabler and obstacle. Considering that 80% of academic-refereed journals in the social sciences are edited in English (Unesco 2010 in Tickner 2013), to publish internationally for “the rest of the world” means to publish in English. Knowledge production in the social sciences is not as universal as it considers itself to be; it is an enterprise accessible to people who can read and write in English with reference to US scholarly debates. The language of publication determines the audience that can access intellectual debates and thus be “up to date.” Consequently, it also defines research trends and validates certain methods of inquiry at the detriment of others. In today's world, grand theory is made in English.

Research opportunities echo these trends. The Institute for Advanced Study, one of the world's most prestigious institutions for making (and breaking) scientific theory, confirms the fundamental absence of the periphery in the construction of knowledge. The

Institute's Community of Scholars counted 238 members in 2013, out of which only three came from institutions located in Latin America and one in Africa. The Institute's report of member representation by country reveals that inequalities between the core and the periphery are a structural trend. Between 1999 and 2009, there has been on average not even one scholar coming from Africa and three only from Latin America per year, whereas on average over ninety-one scholars have come from North America, forty-seven from Western Europe. Of course some of these scholars are studying the non-core, but we should not underestimate the importance of including people from the periphery who contribute a different set of understandings to the work. The dominance of the core is accentuated by the lack of research funds across the global South, where scholars often depend on resources distributed by US foundations or development agencies at the core. Inderjeet Parmar (2012) traced the power of the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations in consolidating US hegemony on the world stage because it exposes the power dynamics that shape intellectual dependency. Most scholars located in the periphery have to adjust their work to agendas and methodologies defined at (by, and usually for) the core.

One reason for the Amazon's absence from IR is the lack of scholars from the area who could enrich scholarly debates with their own perspectives. There are limits for doing what is commonly identified as theory in the periphery. Foundational thinkers have emerged from the periphery, forging a forceful scholarship about developmental economics in Latin American and post-colonial studies in India. The Brazilian Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, whose concept of Amerindian perspectivism influenced Western thought, is one of the exceptions that confirm the rule. The problem is not that there is no science in the periphery; it is that science there tends to look different. The challenge is that its praxis is too different to generate interest in the core. Research produced by or in the South is often dismissed as case studies, not theory, and alternative forms of knowing the world tend to be marginalized as not constituting "real IR" (Tickner and Blaney 2012). The core-periphery inequality in academic production creates a conceptual and epistemological straitjacket that limits what counts as valid scientific knowledge. These asymmetries restrict IR epistemology in the global South, where local scholars end up perpetuating their own marginalization. They reproduce hegemonic knowledge by engaging mostly theory produced at the core. The fact that most of our knowledge about international relations is produced in and by the global North about itself excludes not only other forms of doing IR, but the voices of most of the world.

Today's intellectual division of labor is anchored in the global imperial order (Mignolo 2011). The Euro-centric core is the primary site of scientific production, especially theory building. Peripheries, in turn, offer case-studies without universal reach. IR scholars are aware that journals reproduce the views, theories, and research methods that circulate in the North, giving little chance for other ways of seeing to emerge. In 1977 Stanley Hoffman described International Relations as an American social science. Today, critical scholarship accuses IR theory of defending Western civilization (Hobson 2012) and

self-validating positivist perspectives against other methodologies (Jackson 2011). Like English, the canonized language of IR ensures entry barriers to keep “outsiders” at bay. At least in this field, the rest of the world seems doomed to catch up with the ideas of the North, forced to invoke its science, relate to its epistemologies and follow its methodologies if it wants to be validated. Knowledge produced in the North is universal because it circulates to be consumed in the rest of the world.

IR theorizing takes place in the US. Expanding theory-making to places like Amazonia may be a more challenging enterprise than expected. It is a practice that may not be easily transposable (that would assume a universalism of ways of making sense of the world). Scholars have stressed the significance of place for theory. Edward Said’s (1983) “traveling theory” contextualized theory to its site of production. Yet Tickner’s research implies that it may not be possible to democratize the production of knowledge by simply taking theory elsewhere. First, grand theory does not travel well, partly because it often fails to explain places like Amazonia. Second, and consequently, places like Amazonia end up disengaged from theory. If one challenge is that theory made in the global North is often not all that useful to understand the global South, another one is that the global South is more concerned with practice than theory. Theory is not perceived as useful to solve “real” issues in the periphery, which is marked by a fluid interaction between academe and government (Tickner 2008). In a periphery where borders between theory and praxis are porous, scholars are often involved in praxis in ways rarely experienced by their counterparts at the core. The former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and the current President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, were academics before governing their countries. At a more quotidian scale, many Latin American scholars find themselves having to balance their academic commitments with political agendas, be it contesting authoritarian regimes or mediating peace processes.

My critique of IR echoes a larger concern about the need to validate the forms of intellectuality as practiced in the non-core. Raúl Prebisch spent a life concerned with addressing tensions between centers and the periphery. In 1948 he pushed for the creation of an Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) within the United Nations in Santiago, Chile, with the overt purpose of creating a space to enable Latin American thought on development (Dosman 2008). In the 1970s, Latin America was the sole place across the global South to develop economic theories of its own to respond to its contextual realities, with no equivalent in regions like Asia or Africa. Later, Albert Hirschman fought modernization theorists as he insisted on the importance of the periphery generating its own theory (Adelman 2012). Both Prebisch and Hirschman believed in the significance of producing knowledge in and for the periphery, from the ground up.

The challenge is not to take theory to a “new time and place,” moving it from Paris to Budapest, or to Manaus for that matter. Rather, the question is whether the non-core will bother with appropriating theory as a tool to express its own perspective, or whether it is an exercise characteristic of autistic universalist efforts at the core. The solution to

democratize the production of knowledge may not be to export the methodology of the core to the periphery, “enabling” Latin America and Africa to do (Eurocentric) theory. It is necessary to validate the praxis and knowledge of the periphery in its own terms, even if they appear as non-positivist practices that look nothing like theory to the eyes of the North. It implies recognizing other forms of knowing, whether it is engaging reflexivity (Tickner 2013), understanding how personal narratives influence IR’s theoretical articulations (Inayatullah 2011), or validating Indigenous ways of knowing (Shaw 2008; Beier 2009). It also implies legitimizing case-study perspectives as opposed to mainstream forms of Grand Theory. It implies, among other things, doing IR from the Amazon.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) called on anthropology to dissolve its own theoretical premises for the field to remain viable. He invited anthropologists to break with the savage/civilized dichotomy to produce a cultural critique able to historicize their field. IR, too, needs to radically rethink its own internal tropes if it is to remain viable. This requires a historicization of the state to move beyond the core-periphery impasse, a reflexive IR committed to Ann Tickner’s (2011) calls to reappraise its own foundational stories. The plurality of experiences between the “West” and the “Rest” marks a structural problem of difference in IR (Blaney and Inayatullah 2011). The core-periphery divide is so vast and so complex that post-colonial scholars like Robin Shilliam have publicly proposed killing IR as a way out of the impasse. Perhaps non-core perspectives are simply incommensurable with those of the global North. Didier Fassin (2013) suggests that the experiences of police forces were incommensurable with those of residents on the opposite sides of a confrontation in a Parisian *banlieue* (and vice versa). Perhaps Amazon experiences are virtually impossible to access from the core, creating an incommensurability of experiences between the core and the non-core. Yet having acknowledged our differences, our best shot is to try to subvert them.

Why should we think world politics from the Amazon?

This essay argues that it is necessary to think world politics from the periphery, and posits the Amazon as an insightful periphery to think from. I now offer some arguments as to why it is urgent to address the core-periphery divide in the production of knowledge. In particular, I suggest insights as to why Amazon perspectives may provide different ways of knowing world politics in general and alternative venues to tackle environmental change in particular.

The first good reason to think world politics from the Amazon is to pluralize IR. An Amazonian IR is fundamentally *other*. Bringing the periphery into the core will permit us to decolonize the discipline. It will bring untold stories into IR, and inevitably retell its conceptual foundations. It will complement new perspectives and histories to understandings of what constitutes IR, renew research agendas, expand global praxis. To conceptualize colonial battles on Amazon rivers will, for instance, permit us to historicize (and delocalize) the formation of European claims to sovereignty. To recognize Indigenous

struggles for territoriality in international courts permits IR to think sovereignty in the plural. Peripheral visions can contribute alternative knowledges to break disciplinary straightjackets. Truly decolonizing IR means recognizing the non-core capacity to generate theory. Yet it also means destabilizing theory as we know it. It is not sufficient to add Amazon diversity to the study of IR. Efforts to decolonize IR will require that the discipline expand its knowledge base and turn it upside down. More than tolerating contributions from Amazonia, IR will decolonize only when it is able to disarm hegemonic epistemologies and confront positivist approaches to non-Eurocentric methodologies. It is important to think IR theory from the Amazon because it is an attempt to contest the divide between the universal grand theory and the localized case-study.

IR from Amazonia is especially a good idea because the global North and South are indissociable. The core does not exist without the periphery and the idea of a wild Amazon only acquires meaning as a category relational to the civilized West. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (2012) insist on theory from the South not only because African modernity has always had its own trajectories but especially because North and South are relational categories. State modernity, they claim, is the result of a north-south collaboration, a “world-historical production” (Comaroffs 2012:6). Modernity separated worlds that are, in fact, intimately linked, in which political economies are articulated. In many ways, the Europe we know today emerges out of its colonial encounters, with peripheries like the Amazon being co-constitutive of state modernity. This is what Frantz Fanon meant when he wrote “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World.”¹⁵

Subaltern studies were core to Eurocentric projects, even if they were not allowed to speak. Other peoples and places have always been the looking glass through which the core defined itself. The global North was constructed adopting techniques and knowledges that pre-existed in the Amazon, Africa, and elsewhere. Without Amazon rubber there would be no Fordism or polluting cars in the first place. Empty, uncivilized spaces were key to European material life (rubber) and self-consciousness (indigeneity). Uncivilized Amazonia, like Indigeneities, is part of European representations of difference. The problem with the epistemological basis of IR is that the state is its narrow object of study. Theory-making in IR results in obscuring the amazons of the world. The discipline has no option but to move beyond the core-periphery dynamic if it is to better *see* the world we *actually* live in.

Obfuscated knowledge impairs politics. When the Spaniards arrived in the Andes, they had their own expectations of what sacred idols should look like—man-made, anthropomorphic idols. They could not see “art” that was aesthetically pleasing, and concluded that Andean idols were “ugly” (Dean 2010:11). Spaniards were unable to apprehend rocks as Inca culture saw them (animate, transmutable, powerful, and sentient) thus failing to access the broad array of beliefs and relationships people forged with them. The inability to access meaning in Inca rock echoes a larger European inability to read the New World. Today, IR is similarly impaired; it cannot accurately understand political configurations that differ from those it has defined for itself. As Vanita Seth puts it, “it is

difficult to speak the language of otherness when the other is virtually absent from the discourse of the self” (2010:38). Just as the Spaniards failed to see authority in Inca rock, the failure to see the global significance of the Amazon signals an impaired understanding of the world IR is supposed to explain. A world politics of the Amazon calls for a recognition of the global South as a site of political influence as much as it challenges the canons that structure IR knowledge. I emphasize the significance of the Amazon in international relations not only to acknowledge the international dynamics at play in the region, but further to enable a more comprehensive way of seeing IR.

State-centrism relegates places in the non-core to the past. Enforcing the Eurocentric civilization line, Western thinkers tend to locate non-Western peoples in the European past (Helliwell and Hindess 2011). “In the beginning, all the world was America,” claimed John Locke in his Second Treatise of Government back in 1690. This Western practice of temporalizing difference (Hindess 2007) still permeates knowledge production today. It infuses economic discourse about “emerging” economies and “developing” societies, which evidently upset scholars like Prebisch and Hirschman. The non-core at large is located in subaltern temporalities outside the modern temporality of the (European) state. A fundamental trait of colonial projects is to bring the “uncivilized” into present time. British rule over India was tied to British time because to civilize meant, among others things, to bring *others* into European time (Ogle 2013). Temporal misunderstandings between colonizer and colonized explain, for instance, how seventeenth century history told by Portuguese and Dutch colonizers could differ so much from the one told by the cosmopolitan elites of Java (Bertrand 2011). This temporal dimension created false dichotomies between past and present, giving birth to a defective political thought stuck in the “first in Europe, then elsewhere” (Chakrabarty 2000).

Temporality is a key myth of modern state-making. The European dominion of the time of the state created subaltern temporalities, dislocating non-western spaces to a-temporal dimensions. Peoples outside the temporality of the state became peoples without history (Wolf 1982). The Amazon, the Arctic, the Himalayas, the Sahara are theorized as places of nature in contrast to stateness, and as such relegated to a-temporal places beyond history-making. They are still perceived as Locke once saw America, “before politics.” *Pacha*, a Kichwa word describing both time *and* space, collapses the “here” into the “now,” making time and space two aspects of one single concept. Space is embedded in temporality; location determines time. Kichwa, the most spoken Indigenous language in the Americas, situates time. Eurocentrism, too, tends to situate people’s space in time, especially “other” people in past times. The hegemonic temporality of the state defines present time, leaving that which is “apolitical” outside the *pacha* (time/place) of the modern state.

This articulation between time and space shapes world politics. It is this political understanding of temporality that enabled the doctrine of discovery. European monarchies and the Catholic Church invoked the concept of *terra nullius* to grab lands “without a past” from Mexico to Australia. In 1550, the Valladolid Debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Sepulveda argued about whether Indigenous peoples had political autonomy, and

therefore history. Then, as now, Indigenous peoples have to prove their political existence to claim authority over their land. This is clear in current Australian and US law, which require that natives prove their history through state documentation in order to acquire authority over their ancestral land. Indigenous peoples have to make their own history commensurable to the temporality of the state to exist politically. In other words, recognition of political history brings recognition of political territory. Time and space are central elements for critical inquiries seeking to restore the invisible peoples (and places) without history. This is why the Australian outback calls for a place-oriented history (Hokari 2011). This is why the Amazon is a strategic place to think stateness, sovereignty, and territoriality.

The Amazon is an insightful periphery to think IR in various ways. Most immediately, Amazon perspectives bring new blood in critical currents to further expand the borders of what constitutes legitimate IR. Underlying this research is the idea that Amazon perspectives can free IR from further inbreeding. An “Amazonian IR” answers calls on what IR looks like when practiced in the non-core. It offers an unusual periphery to expand the horizons of non-core thought while contesting the disciplinary imperialism of state-centrism. Further, the Amazon is a place where epistemological breakthroughs are possible when trying to rethink stateness. The idea of an Amazonian IR proposes to anchor theory-making in area studies, blurring a long-standing disciplinary divide. It responds to scholarly calls to think ourselves beyond the nation and to look within it (Chatterjee 2010) and to reach beyond the inadequacies of the European nation-state (Chakrabarty 2000). Breaking away from dominant patterns of knowledge production requires alternative histories to open up our imagination. Following critical scholarship that established the limits of seeing through the lens of the state (Scott 1998), we need to complement reconceptualization with praxis. IR will better envision a world politics emancipated from the state if we can see what that might actually look like. To explore the Amazon as an example of political modernity beyond the state does exactly that.

Theoretically, Amazon territoriality disturbs IR. No one government adequately represents it internationally, yet it is embedded in global flows, financial and atmospheric alike. The global is deeply imbricated in the multiple territorialities of the Amazon. The Amazon is a co-producer and a solution of the global climate crisis. It was Amazon rubber that enabled the car revolution in the North and Amazon crude oil that now fuels the climate crisis. The Amazon is also at the heart of the solutions to tackle planetary crises, not only because it represents the lungs of the planet and a depository of biodiversity for future generations, but also for the environmental practices it has successfully maintained. Amazon territoriality does not fit within IR disciplinary categories, and for this reason it permits alternative forms of seeing IR. The Amazon lies outside the boundaries of IR, yet is constitutive of IR. The region is central to world politics not only historically, but also in its theoretical and political construction. One way to think the Amazon is through Andrew Zimmerman’s (2013) proposal of a multi-sited historiography. Multi-sited research, he argues, can bring together on a single scale what other approaches may distinguish as

abstract theory and concrete reality. A multi-sited IR encompassing Amazonia could offer an opportunity to employ specific modes of inquiry to contribute to global understandings (ethnography in the world system to ethnography of the world system). It implies more than bringing IR to the Amazon; it means using Amazonia as an analytical category in the construction of theory. Such an approach also permits us to move beyond the immediacy of our different experiences in the core and the non-core (Scott in Zimmerman 2013:337), allowing us to escape the trap of thinking in terms of incommensurable experiences.

Further, an Amazon-based approach to world politics could provide alternative ways of conceptualizing nature in debates about climate change. There are some problems in the way the global North conceptualizes nature. Take for instance two scenarios of North American environmentalism and recent debates on the anthropocene. One concentrated on the conservation of “wild” landscapes, protecting Indigenous Amazonians for being part of wild rainforests. The others posits Amazonians as part of the human species that is generating irreversible climate change. In both cases, Amazonians are portrayed as lacking agency in a sort of conceptual absolutism. Neither perspective acknowledges the complexity of their agency. Perhaps integrating international perspectives from natural peripheries like the Amazon (and the Sahara and the Arctic) is one way to expand existing ways of seeing the climate change debate. Perceptions of a wild Amazon betray the divide between politics and nature and the difficulty the West/global North has in conceptualizing a post-enlightenment relationship between men and nature. An Amazonian IR defies the enduring antithesis between state and nature. Bringing the Amazon into IR will not only shed light on invisible histories and emancipate IR scholarship. It can also inspire new ways to bridge the North-South divide on environmental policy.

Conclusion

The Amazon is a resourceful space from which to think world politics. In *Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin tells of invisible pathways across Australia that Aboriginals sing into existence. This essay is an invitation to write the International Relations of the Amazon into existence. First, Amazonia is all too international to remain invisible in the study of world politics. Although the Amazon landscape has been politicized for millennia, it remains pretty much untouched by IR. Second, the proposal to rethink IR from Amazonia responds to an epistemological impasse in the discipline. IR is unable to see the Amazon because the non-core is dismissed as irrelevant to scientific theory. The Amazon is a strategic site to debunk the core-periphery dichotomy in IR by emphasizing their embeddedness. The call to do an Amazon IR is an effort to rescue the Amazon from historical oblivion as much as one to free IR from hegemonic processes of knowledge production.

This essay hopes to break silences and incite scholars to discern other places from which to do IR. Amazonia does more than provide exciting horizons ahead for the study of

world politics. It offers the opportunity to turn IR's most entrenched belief system upside down.

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ENDNOTES

1. In Greek, *a-mazon* means without-breast. Although the river was first named Nueva Andalucia, Frey Gaspar de Carvajal's chronicles of women warriors along the river quickly led to the naming of Amazons. English manuscripts dating back to 1611 show Captain M. Morton referring to the "river of the Amazonas." For more on Greek Amazon mythology, see Fantham, Foley, Kampon et al (1994), *Women in the Classical World*, Oxford.
2. Researchers found a set of "garden cities" built as early as 1250 in the forests of the south-central Amazon (Mann 2005).
3. I interchangeably use global North/West/core to refer to the same locale of dominance and global South/non-West/periphery to refer to places of subalterity.
4. *The Chicago Manual of Style* (8.41, 15th edition) indicates that names of ethnic and national groups are to be capitalized, including adjectives associated with these names. Because "Indigenous" refers to such a group, it is capitalized in this essay.
5. In 1654, Recife's Dutch colony fell to the Portuguese. Many of the nearly five thousand people returned to the Netherlands, some scattered in the Caribbean, and others migrated north to settle in New Amsterdam, i.e., Manhattan. The Dutch later ceded Manhattan to the British in exchange for Suriname. The political history of Amazonia is thus directly interwoven with US history.
6. In 1620, North was imprisoned and his charter recalled, then re-authorized. It survived through different patents from the British Crown, first renamed the Guyana Company, then the Guinea Company.
7. Alencastro (2006) estimates that the number Indigenous peoples enslaved between 1625 and 1650 in Brazil equals that of African populations brought to Brazil by Dutch and Portuguese ships in the same period.
8. The word *Cabanagem* refers to the people who lived in cabanas, the region's poorest housing. The use of *cabanos* to refer to residents of the huts made of palm and wood carries negative connotations of backwardness and poverty, and was retrospectively

applied to the participants of the rebellion (who describe themselves as defenders of the homeland and freedom). See Harris 2010.

9. Brazil was a Portuguese colony until it became the home of the Portuguese colonial empire in 1808, when the King fled Napoleon's invasion of Lisbon and settled his court in Rio de Janeiro. In 1822, Brazil declared Independence from Portugal and became an Empire until a military coup d'Etat established the New Republic in 1889.
10. Five years of civil war killed about half the population of Grão-Pará.
11. The origins of the plantations producing 98% of the world's natural rubber is traced to the domestication of a single Amazonian species, *Hevea brasiliensis*. See Schultes (1993) "The Domestication of the Rubber Tree," *Economic and Sociological Implications* 52(4): 479-485.
12. The Mario Vargas Llosa historical novel, *The Dream of the Celt* (2010), is inspired from the rubber boom, depicting international interests in the region as much of the violence that marked Amazonian societies. The extreme violence at the infamous Casa Arana, on the Putumayo River, Colombia, led to an international tribunal (Camacho 2003).
13. The sinking of the vessel bringing all the iron from Philadelphia in 1878 delayed the beginning of construction. See Hardman 1988.
14. Intangible zones are large areas of forest declared off-limits to development projects that are reserved for Amazon Indigenous peoples.
15. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* in Zimmerman (2013:333).