

AFRICA AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Akinbode Fasakin¹

Introduction

Brian Schmidt's (2013, 21) call for a research on the history and historiography of the field of International Relations (IR) brings to the fore the need to reflect deeply and more broadly on IR's history in Africa. Although Schmidt questions the field historiography, calling for a critical review of what currently exists as the field's origin or something like a detailed capsule history that covers the different discourses in the evolution of the discipline, his call makes reflection on Africa's place in such a review necessary. This requires at least figuring out what discourses exist in Africa in relation to the study of IR in order to rethink truly IR's dominant and coherently offered evolutionary narratives. Such exercise could certainly enhance our understanding of the discipline in other places, away from the mythical great debates that dominate the field's history (Kahler 1997), and possibly take cognisance of obscured views, discourses and theories, researchers and theorists that self-consciously profess IR as their discipline, and institutions (universities and nations) that contribute to the development of IR where they exist. This essay aims to use some of these criteria, as provided by Schmidt and supported by Duncan Bell to comment on the evolution of IR in Africa and use that in turn to propose a direction for the future of the discipline in Africa (Bell 2009)².

¹ Political Science Department, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden. E-mail: bodefaskin@yahoo.co.uk; akinbode.fasakin@fhs.se.

² According to Bell (2009, 4), "disciplinary history writing should be complemented, and possibly complicated, by the study of 'histories of the global' – histories, that is, of the multiple ways in which global politics (or aspects of it) has been conceptualized across a variety of institutional sites, including universities, research laboratories, think-tanks, philanthropic foundations and government agencies". I also consider relevant in this study Hoffman's (1977, 41) categorisation of IR as an autonomous part of Political Science.

Although the dominant rendition of IR's historiography appears a simplification of a more complicated history, an appropriation of a discipline whose origin, evolution and development cover a more detailed account across regions, time and space, it is argued that using some criteria helps throw light on IR evolution in these different time and areas. This study does this rendition in Africa to show how the discipline developed as a distinct field that is concerned with global politics and designed to serve national interests abroad or blend policy makers' so-called national interests with those of researchers, driven by personal experience, disciplinary goals and career objectives, what Hoffman (1977, 47) calls a "remarkable chronological convergence". Therefore, although Schmidt problematized the prevalent interpretations of the field's development, contending that IR's history is both more complicated and less well known than typically portrayed, I show why such dominant narrative of IR's historiography holds sway, particularly in relation to Africa (Schmidt 2013, 4). It is against this background that this paper explores how we might think about IR in Africa and IR historiography around the world in general, especially for it to accommodate developments in different scholarly communities and for those communities to make inputs beyond the usual challenge to American dominance.

The essay begins by showing why American influence remains prevalent and indelible in the field and the rendition of its history; essentially making the claim that IR developed within the parameters and agenda set by the United States, albeit with contributions from Europe – especially the United Kingdom. Evidences of American influence on the field, in terms of theoretical contributions, the global spread of American developed and backed theories and methodologies and the acceptance of the mythical rendition of IR's historiography provided by American scholars are not just mere justifications for this claim but also form the basis for American IR to acquire the 'scientific' edge over others. American views were thus not only eventually adopted by many scholars abroad and the field in general, taking for instance IR's introductory texts and the narration of the mythical debates within them, but also by statesmen from many other countries, especially those from Africa, who began to pattern their policies after America in neglect of their former colonial governments' styles. It is plausible to say that IR as a discipline benefited first from Europe before America made its contributions and that some of America's contributions are from those that are in fact originally Europeans (such as Nicholas Spykman, Hans Morgenthau and Stanley Hoffman among others).

However, America further leveraged on its newly acquired post-World War II status and circumstances to entrench its place in the study of IR. As a

world power, its view carried much weight than any other country or region of the world and its scholars' propositions simply became canons and standards by which other scholars measure their contribution, particularly in the era of the debate over the scientific nature of the discipline. It is along this line of reasoning that one may observe that since the emergence of China as a major power around the world, Asia has begun to count as contributing to global affairs and debates, while scholars working on Asia, who are not necessarily Chinese, are gaining more prominence. The corollary of this is that they could emerge as "distinct IR voices" if they project Chinese policies and canonise these ideas if China overtakes the US (Waever 1998, 688).

As Europe, America and Asia each has something to say about how they initially used studying the world out there to reflect their contributions to the field, this study thus explores that of the African continent and its scholars in the development of the field in section that follows. In my concluding remarks, I argue that while the contests over IR's historiography is a new, fledgling and budding area of research, it is reasonable to think about incorporating IR varied regional and theoretically experiences, where they verily exist, or yet to be known, in rewriting IR's historiography. The call for (political and/or intellectual) scholarly will to do so is crucial. Even if this would not guarantee a consensus on IR's historiography, it could at least provide an avenue for conceding to and documenting some of the inherent errors in what currently serves as IR's historiography and lend voice to the previously ignored contributions that could help provide a robust and standard account of the discipline's history. More importantly, the need for Africa to take advantage of this revision to make specific contribution in the IR field by reflecting its experiences and events, which had already begun with the postcolonial theory, in the reorientation process of the IR field preoccupies the penultimate section of the paper, while the last section concludes the paper.

IR as an American Social Science?

One of IR's clichés is Stanley Hoffman's IR as an American Social Science. Even though the first IR Chair was endowed in Aberystwyth, Wales, United Kingdom earlier in 1919, "it was in the United States that international relations became a discipline" prior to and more deeply after the Second World War (WWII) according to Hoffmann (1977, 42). It was in the United States that "foreign policy was [first] put under domestic checks and balances, [and] knew no career caste, and paid little respect to the rules and rituals

of the initiated European happy few” (Hoffmann 1977, 43). By this time, America had developed as a relatively democratic society with intellectuals that had come from different walks of life settling in the US. Subsequently, IR “the convergence of intellectual predispositions, political circumstances, and institutional opportunities”, the discipline and profession of IR specialists happen to be predominantly American (Hoffmann 1977, 45-46). Drawing on the nature of a precise science of politics, given the empirical methodology gaining ground in American social sciences as well as the need to explain previous events and wars, including the rise to global prominence of America after WWII, American self-identified IR scholars set the tone that led to the development of a social science field of IR. These scholars did not only evolve a field that justified American leaders’ quests for deeper engagements in world affairs, in an incipient, perhaps well-crafted, Cold War environment they had framed, but also provided rationalisations to rally public support around these leaders in the pursuit and acquisition of national interests and state power (Booth 1997). Clearly, internal conditions within the discipline and external contexts have worked together to develop a social science IR in America, giving it some influence and later hegemonic status around the world.

Only few IR historiographers find this claim, or Hoffman’s delivery to be controversial. Although they believe there was IR in other places, especially in Europe where we often refer to the state system as Eurocentric and the systematic study of the behaviour of these actors existed before the Americans studied IR (Watson 1992; Buzan & Little 2000; Bull and Watson 1984), many scholars contend that Hoffman rendered a brilliant account of the American hegemony and supremacy in the IR discipline. For example, Schmidt asserts that despite the influence of a great many European-born IR scholars, the discipline evolved into an American social science (Schmidt 2013). Duncan Bell (2009, 4) posits that the United States and its researchers have acted as the centre of gravity in the so-called evolution and developments of the IR discipline, suggesting that Americans contributed to the development of the field and remain hegemonic within it. Without contesting this assertion, even though he challenged the sociology of such a not so international discipline, Wæver (1998) provides rationale for such a dominance. According to him, IR’s reflection on its development and progress make mainstream IR enthusiastically integrates with theories peculiar to the United States, which are furthermore attractive due to the distinctively American ideals of social science, especially the need to have an “objective” study international politics. According to Wæver (1998), Hoffmann’s brilliant and convincing insights about why IR emerged as a full-size discipline in the United States, accounts for why it took the form it did, often setting the tone for others in the field to follow.

It may thus be seen, as Schmidt (2013, 5) believes that “presentism, which involves the practice of writing a history of the field for the purpose of making a point about its present character” and “contextualism, which assumes that exogenous events in the realm of international politics have fundamentally structured the historical development of IR as an academic field of study”. Consequently, contextualism, or American IR writers’ interpretation of major world events and significant changes in America, including America’s foreign policy options and directions, became directly responsible for the rise and fall of different theories, methodologies, and foci areas in the field. While the cumulative nature of knowledge later propelled these theories, providing justifications for their development, states with power after the major events such as the World Wars merely employed the development of a discipline to form knowledge around global affairs. This pattern, which was not in any way dissimilar from the processes by which the Europeans power of the pre-American era undertook in the course of universalising their ideas and establishing its dominance, enabled them to illustrate what they consider as global problems through their points of view (Seth 2011, 170).

When what became dominant theories of IR (Idealism and Realism), which emerged between the First and the Second World Wars, developed, these states and their thinkers took stock of these developments in the world, thus deciding both the identity and concerns of IR. It was not until after the WWII, and the during the Cold War in particular, that these theories developed much further, dominating the field’s landscape and providing insights to social scientists and practitioners of the science of international politics³. IR’s original thoughts mimicked writings in Philosophy, History, Political Science and International Law but much less Economics. The desire to have its own science and meet up with the methodology of social science as in Economics resulted in the adopted their “scientific” method. Clearly, earlier IR experts before American writers emerged took theorising in this particular manner for granted and merely took stock of ‘world’ events as though they were documenting history, professing solutions as they deemed fit in relations to the same problems of the causes of war and the nature of man within the international system that American realists identified. If the progenitors of the English school of IR that now became labelled as “utopians” were anything to go by, then it is little surprise that IR at the point merely sought to solve specific (inter)national problems from a particular perspective.

³ Kenneth Waltz was particularly significant in this respect. His seminal text, *Theory of International Politics*, became influential in constructing a science of international politics.

Consequently, by first adopting explanatory methods used in history and philosophy and later taking on the (natural) scientific methods, IR, which had attempted to understand the nature of international politics among states, came to an inevitable and desirable maturation for many American writers in the social science field of study. This was the process of the professionalization and subsequent hardening of IR immediately after the First World War as well as during the interwar years by liberal thinkers but more firmly later on by realists and scientists in the post-1945 world. By the time realist provided what seemed as a consensus in the burgeoning IR discipline, interwar contributions by liberals, Realism had carefully re-scripted liberal ideas to reflect utopianism, setting forth the first debate that would provide legitimacy to the birth of a discipline. This carefully crafted realist reflection of the field, would go on to pitch them against idealists in the intervening years in what became popularized as the first great debate. Realists “triumph” pitched them against scientists (behaviourists) in the second debate. The story went further to show how traditionalists and postmodernists also engaged in a third debate. While the third debate created an IR field of study that is pluralist in nature, it is significant in that it highlights the amount of developments that the field has experienced from the period of its first established chair in Aberystwyth. This is significant in that one of the notable features and of course weaknesses of the popular rendition of the debates is the desire for the field to acquire a scientific status. Consequently, rather than measure progress in the Khunian paradigmatic sense, advancements in IR took the form of challenging, not upturning, previous theories and providing alternatives in line with contexts. This quest for scientific IR however undermined many issues that contributed to the evolution of IR and put IR theories in clusters of ‘paradigms’.

IR is not necessarily an American social science, only that America’s influence remains indelible in the field. Evidences, including the two rationale for American influence on the field are sufficient justifications for the dominance of American, its mainstream theory, Realism, as well as the mythical rendition of IR’s historiography provided by these scholars. This approach was not eventually only adopted in writing the historiography of IR but by statesmen in other countries whose policies are designed to build reflect an American IR scholarship, some of them imitating American leaders’ policies. Nevertheless, it could be said that although IR is a discipline that has benefited from and developed out of the evolutions in the social sciences, its growing appeal to government and scholarly impulses to meet expectations of government and sponsors in America more than anywhere else remains a point to reference while thinking about IR’s evolution. It should be borne in mind that American dominance in IR’s historiography

could not have been otherwise, especially given the above circumstance. American colossal and overbearing influence over most parts and on near total presence on global issues after the Second World War placed the country and its IR scholars on the world stage, as the cynosure of thinking, writing and practice within the field. Many scholarly fields of study within American social sciences, including Economics and Political Science, appear to benefit also from this overbearing reach and influence.

Although the rationales provided for US hegemony in IR may seem to simplify the historiography of IR. Nonetheless, they offer insights to apprehending how IR's historiography remains told the way it is and how it became a model for regions outside of the United States. The paradox apparent from the above is that the rendition of IR's historiography through the American prism is a myth to the rest of the world but America's reality, representing how Americans at state policy and theoretical levels understood the world and studied IR. Therefore, even if the popular narrative of IR's evolution is a mythical story of the great debates, IR specialists', most of whom had been political scientists and domiciled in the United States and Western Europe, were absorbed with developing a field of study similar to those already firmly developed in American social sciences. Additionally, the social and political contexts, especially developments around the world, and the need to meet the demands of audience, including policy practitioner and scholars, drove the efflorescence of a field that was already evolving. As the preferred account of the post war consensus was event driven, key IR theories, especially Realism, offer account of world event through the lens of the nature of man and the state within the structure of an anarchical society. The fact that rewards, in terms of the patronage, followed realists' researches enabled the advancement of this sort of researches. "Realism was doubly favoured: Not only did it benefit from the same research infrastructure, but also its theoretical stance fit with renewed government emphasis on international commitment and on meeting the Soviet threats" (Kahler 1997, 28). This is American science of IR. Although to a number of IR historiographers, this is nothing other than American IR discipline defining mythology, coherently, elegantly and eloquently told, it served its purpose transmitting a particular type of knowledge and visions of American self, scholarship and society and interpretation of the world to the world. It is a different story that this performs various legitimating functions, classifying Realism and the subsequent behaviourist turn as products of intellectual progress and consigning others into the dustbin of history; it was the peculiarity of American IR. As Bell (2009, 5) argues, this myth has been the engine of identity construction, helping to mark and police the boundaries of the discipline, as well as shaping

the self-understandings of scholars. Since it is not all of IR's historiography, it must be seen from its limited point of view. It is perhaps for this sort of appropriation that Bell (2009, 4) calls for the study of the "histories of the global", where one can study differently the histories "of the multiple ways in which global politics (or aspects of it) has been conceptualized across a variety of institutional sites, including universities, research laboratories, think-tanks, philanthropic foundations and government agencies".

A view on the deification of American disciplinary model by researchers in other parts of the world is less explored. To gain regional account of IR's historiography not necessarily included in IR's history, I turn to the institutional development of IR in Africa in the next section (Vitalis 2005, 160-161).

Africa and IR's Historiography

In this section, I examine what one may refer to as Africa's contribution to the history of IR, African IR's historiography, for want of a better phraseology. I begin with two caveats. One, it is apposite to state beforehand that this piece cannot capture the whole gamut of African experiences with the external world; since IR or the writing of its history for that matter is huge and such an exercise is near impracticable if not unimaginably vast to be captured in such a short piece. More so, Africa, and African studies about the world, is not a monolith; it has deep and complex histories, societies, relations, dimensions and writings, too vast and complicated for representation here. I merely identify and cover very few of the highlights of Africans' contributions to IR's historiography and discipline with reference to scholars and works that self-identify as IR writers, institutional affiliation, government established and funded institutions and other cognate features that delineate a professional discipline. Although the work is about African IR historiography, I draw on personal experience as an African researcher, interactions with colleagues and evidence from the literature to make my claim. The study also draws largely from the Nigerian example, even though most of the issues reflect African instances and resonate across the board.

Two, I believe it is important to think about this sort of endeavour by stating that it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine African IR's historiography outside of Africa's history. Africa is a region whose history and place in the world's socio-cultural, economic and political ladder define the interests of its scholars, their understanding of world affairs, their approach and disposition towards the discipline and the kind of contributions they

made to the development of the field; the same way these factors influence African policy-makers. It is, therefore, important to understand and state that although Africans contribute to international relations in general, even as of the period of the formal establishment of the first Chair in IR at Aberystwyth, and the origin of academic institutions studying in the West in the previous decade, African states were yet to be independent actors studying IR. The states were neither independent, capable of making their own diplomatic decisions towards the external others on their own, in the Westphalian state system sense, nor their scholars 'doing' independent thinking about the world from African based institutions. Suffice to say, nonetheless, that although many African countries were under colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century, Africans were aware of the international politics at play globally and in international relations in general as it affected their thinking about their state statuses. They realised that their 'countries' and situation were tied to powers and events outside Africa, hence the birth of liberation movements driven by writings on the travails of the colonies and the evils of colonialism during this period. These writings became precursors to subsequent nationalist agitations in Africa⁴. It is important to reiterate that while this is not to suggest that thinking was not part of the African societies, thinking about and knowing IR as a discipline is undocumented.

IR scholarship would formally begin in Africa about four decades after the first formal Chair in Aberystwyth, when a few African countries had gained independence or at the verge of and started to establish universities and research institutions to study how to pursue their various states' foreign policies and other related issues in international affairs in their countries. Nigeria took the lead in 1956, few years before its independence, when the pre-independent self-governing government presented series of policy measures to the parliament to train future Nigerian diplomats (Aluko 1987). Emergent Nigerian leaders interested in the world out there, who initially took a sublime approach to international relations, maintaining a pro-British combined with a Western posture, sought to understand international affairs by training diplomatic personnel for this job. Meanwhile, Nigerians had studied International Relations up to PhD level in American and British Universities. Shortly after independence, when the government established the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) in 1961, one of them, Lawrence A. Fabunmi, who had studied History but whose thesis entitled: *The*

⁴ Although most of the early writers about Africa were blacks in America, their writings were not known as IR writings. They however helped in stirring nationalism agitations in Africa. Writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois (Sociologist and Historian) and Marcus Garvey (Journalist) are notable among others.

Sudan in Anglo-Egyptian Relations: A Case of Power Politics, 1900-1756 was an instance of a classic realist exploration became NIIA's first director. Fabunmi is a product of the University of London. As a research institution, NIIA's core tasks revolve around providing foreign policy advice and directions for the Nigerian government and researching international relations in general as well as acting as a think tank for the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office, later known as the Ministry of External Relations, and now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁵.

Later on in 1977, the University of Ife, earlier founded in 1962 by the regional government of Western Nigeria, endowed the first Chair in International Relations in Africa under the Faculty of Administration after it had developed and run diploma and postgraduate courses in IR⁶. UNIFE, as it was called then, produced Professor Olajide Aluko, sub-Saharan Africa's first professor of International Relations and a set vibrant scholars whose works were exclusively IR⁷. Although the department was part of the establishment of the Institute of Administration in 1963, previously created at the University of Ibadan before moving to its permanent site in Ile-Ife in 1966, the department did not gain autonomous status until 1970. Since around 1970, following the end of the civil war (1967-1970) and Nigerian government's desire to pursue an effective foreign policy, Ife ran professional and certificate programmes for personnel of the foreign affairs department. Its academic staff, numbering about fifteen, who earned their PhDs largely in Political Science and International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science and UK and American universities, published books and journal articles on Nigeria and its neighbours, foreign policy matters and essentially contributed African perspectives to international affairs. Shortly afterwards, the Amhadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) started the Department of Political Science and International Studies in 1976, after previously being known as the Department of Government since 1967.

While the University of Ibadan (an affiliate of the University of London and Nigeria's premier university established in 1948) and the

⁵ Even though they have slightly dissimilar functions, the NIIA copies the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

⁶ Although a number of departments identifying with international relations have sprung up ever since in Nigeria, most of them come under History, Political Science and as Departments of Diplomatic and International Studies. Only few Nigerian Universities study and self-identify as international relations as Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife since 1987).

⁷ Due to these researchers' works, they were dubbed the Ife school of IR. They include Aluko, J. B. Ojo, Oye Ogunbadejo, Olusola Ojo, Amadu Sesay, Ralph Onwuka, Amechi Okolo, Orobola Fasehun and Layi Abegunrin among a host of others.

University of Nigeria, Nsukka (established 1960) offered courses such as comparative government, foreign politics of the Great Powers and African states under Political Science, they did not offer IR as a separate discipline (Aluko 1987, 314). In other African countries such as Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania, departments such as Department of Political Science at the University of Cairo, the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS) and Department of Government at Nairobi University and the Departments of Government, Political Science, or Liberal studies respectively engage in IR related scholarship. Scholarly luminaries such as Egyptian Boutros Ghali and Samir Amin, Kenyan Ali Mazrui, Nigeria's Adele Jinadu, Claude Ake and Segun Osoba, most of whom self-identify as political scientist, were among the notably known scholars contributing to African apprehension and analysis of world affairs and the study of IR (Ofuho 2009, 73; Schoeman 2009).

While one may say IR African writers, focused on making contributions related to the diplomatic relations and practices, and foreign policies of their respective countries, their inputs were relevant in making meaning of IR for Africa's sake than partaking in the mainstream debates within the field. Although the Cold War provided the context for their analysis, they reflected more on Africa's place in the world and engaged with this context to improve understanding of African existential realities, some related to the issues that African political scientists and historians had been preoccupied with over time, rather than engaging in a discursive manner through theory and disciplinary development. Although they lack consensus in their view of Africa, approaching it from diverse perspectives, they directed their research on Africa and the world rather than as part of the world of scholarly debates going on in the West. Those that self-profess as African IR scholars did not approach the discipline by the pattern followed as that between the different schools of thought such as between Idealism and Realism, providing a different theory, or in the form of institutional and national locations, as was the case between IR in America and IR in the UK.

Nevertheless, there are at least two ways to apprehend African IR's historiography. One, they provided definitional or conceptual clarification in a way that attempt to set the boundary between IR as a discipline and other disciplines that attempt to study what they study. Early African IR scholars were not in doubt about the definitional obfuscation prevalent in the discipline (Brown 1997). They were also aware of the influence fields like History and Political Science exerted and could exert on IR. This is in fact further necessary for government funding, since IR appeared to have more relevance for government policies and programmes and gained more

of government's funding and attention than Political Science. More so, the IR scholars had established the Nigerian Society of International Affairs (Jinadu 1987). Lastly, the definition is useful in the light of the confusion between international relations as all manners of interactions among various actors on the world's stage and international politics as a synonym meaning either such interactions or the subject's theme or aspects of international relations, often commonly conflated mostly by American writers. For these reasons, early African IR scholars reflected on the definitional and conceptual confusion and provided meaning to IR as a discipline, focusing on what should constitute its subject matter; IR should be about the politics of international relations (Aluko 1987, 312). To this end, Aluko (1987) defines IR as the field that studies the politics within "all forms of ties across national boundaries, ranging from politico-diplomatic, security-military and economic-developmental to socio-cultural", whereas international politics, a relational concept to IR, "refers specifically to the political aspects of such relations". For Ofuho (2009, 71), this definition is not only a "first step towards making IR scholarship more inclusive and truly "international"", but crucial towards analysing the discipline's evolution, developments and dynamics in relations to Africa.

Secondly, Africans approach IR issues, mostly those concerning them within the world, either through the mainstream prisms or through alternative perspectives, albeit using, in both cases, African empirical cases to test Western or imported theories in order to take sides with these theories or challenge them as well as their epistemologies and methodologies. While this suggests that African IR scholars were less reflective of the sociology of the discipline, making no theoretical contribution and lacking any form of assessment of the discipline's template, they copy existing thoughts, believing it to be coming from an already established discipline to interpret African IR. This thinking underpinned the adoption and adaptation of IR, an American social science and Realism, American theory by many early African IR scholars. It was on this basis that they adopted 'IR establishments' from America to design their research agenda, university curricula and foreign policies. For these scholars, IR was not only a discipline whose study originated in Westphalia, the First and the Second World Wars, it was a discipline whose essence Africans researchers assumed to be suitably settled through which what is needed is an interrogation of Africa from these perspectives (Ofuho 2009, 76). One of the pioneers of IR in Ife is of the opinion that "both the theoretical and practical tones concerning IR in Africa are set outside of the continent. African IR researchers merely adapt it to suit African reality. Africans, generally speaking, have not built IR theories or created much theorists in general. Only few can actually identify as theorists or IR theorists.

Our contributions are not about theories but the response and adaptation of existing theories to African realities. This we do from an African perspective” (Ojo 2017).

It is little wonder then that Africans doing IR were reliant on Realism, Marxism, the levels of analysis problem and other approaches developed mostly in America and Europe in studying IR and analysing their respective countries’ foreign policies. A good example that illustrates this point is how Nigerian writers, copying American authors and their views of America’s role in the American continent, described Nigeria as having a manifest destiny and historic mission. For them, Nigeria is destined to lead Africa and the black race and it must acquire military and economic power use it in order to do so. They also described Nigeria as having three concentric circles of foreign policy, for which Africa is the centrepiece, based on Nigeria’s enlightened self-interest (Olusanya and Akindele 1986). Similarly, Nigeria’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Bolaji Akinyemi, in line with the realist thinking predominant at the time, nudged Nigeria into convening the Concert of Medium Powers in 1987. This influence happens to be significant that even when African researchers do not subscribe ideologically and theoretically to particular American or Western orientations, they draw inspirations from them in order to analyse Africa and its IR. An instance is a book written to depict the ‘failings’ of a hegemonic power country after previous realist scholars depict Nigeria as bearing a manifest destiny. Adekeye Adebajo and Abdul Rauf Mustapha, authors that are not necessarily realists by inclination, wrote *Gulliver’s Troubles: Nigeria’s Foreign Policy after the Cold War* in 2008. Their book follows in the footsteps of Stanley Hoffmann’s *Gulliver’s Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* published in 1968, written exactly forty years before Adebajo and Mustapha. Nevertheless, it is not to say that African IR scholars have not brought distinction, ingenuity and their style to scholarship, the point is that there are observable similarities in terms of how they conduct IR scholarship in Africa.

Where African scholars do not adopt and adapt dominant Western ideas to represent African IR, they borrow from alternative Western theories, such as Marxism, or import theories from other developing countries, such as Immanuel Wallerstein’s dependency theory from Latin America, to explain African IR. Scholars in this category do not merely resent the colonial ancestry of African states but believe dominant theoretical constructs, such as Realism and Liberalism, privilege the Great powers and external forces that are still at play in Africa. Concerned with explaining African socio-economic problems, scholars with this school of thought borrowed from Marx’s analysis of class and Wallerstein’s exposition of developing countries’ reliance on the

developed countries within a skewed world system to contribute to North-South debates in IR. These African critical thinkers, who highlight the role of external constraints on African predicaments, receive criticisms for being too externally focused, leaving aside how internal dynamics constitute the major causes of African predicament. There is also a sense in that, while most of these writers are highly cerebral, they may become accustomed to elegantly rehashing and recycling the theoretical arguments that they subscribe to in analysing Africa IR⁸. Again, like the African realist adherents, they retrograde variants of Western theories by merely testing empirical trends on existing theories (Thakur 2015, 213).

IR in Contemporary Africa: What and How to Contribute to the Discipline

In this section, I explore ways by which African IR scholars can contribute to the field of IR. The fact of their membership of the international system is no least reason why this should be taken seriously. I express three concerns here: due attention must be placed on the lack of research sources that inhibit cutting edge research in Africa; exploration of history, particularly African history as well as events, is crucial to making impacts in IR; and, the reawakening and broadening of African contribution to postcolonial theory is at no other time more urgent than now.

It was Olajide Aluko (1987) who first identified the problem of inadequate research resources for African IR researchers to work with. Inadequate funding from government and private sectors for research in the field, the absence of access to valuable data (most official policy documents are inaccessible or official state secret), and an absence of synergy, or perhaps rivalry as he put it, between the researchers and those involved in African external affairs hamper research even in the 1980s (Aluko 1987, 316)⁹. If this was the case in the 1980s, the problems have magnified exponentially in the 2000s. With the exception of the proliferation of universities, most of which are private educational enterprises, which is inversely proportional to the quality of university education in many African countries, there is an

⁸ The scholars I interacted with share this view. To them, the proliferation of rehashed works may have to do with pecuniary benefits. The culture of recognition/promotion based on number of publications is rife in Africa.

⁹ Akindele (2005, 62-63) mentions the absence of synergy between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NIIA.

abundance of lack of almost everything valuable a 21st century should have. From skilled, qualified and competent hands to research funding and grants to research collaborations with others to recent academic publications among others, many African universities are behind their counterparts in other parts of the world. Many African topmost universities are shadows of themselves in terms of physical infrastructure, while intellectual engagements such as exchange programmes, workshops, seminars and what have you on national and global affairs, which were vibrant in the first few decades of independence up to the late 1980s, have vanished in most universities. How on earth can a university whose premises are only a few building, few staff, most of whom are recruited on an *ad hoc* basis to pass African universities accreditation exercises behave as the universities of the 1980s?

The problem with the study and practice of IR in Africa is that of poor infrastructural facilities across the universities. This problem crept into Africa under the neoliberal policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1980s and 1990s. Many African countries have not recovered from the policy that prioritised the rolling back of the state in the provision of essential services including education, health and other essential social services and allow the forces of the market to determine service/product and price and consequently bring about efficiency. As I have point out above, it is foolhardy to expect so much from the private universities because they are the ones who engage mostly in the practices described above. Private universities have not only failed to provide viable alternatives, they have narrowed access to education. On the part of African governments, budgetary allocation is not only small, it is also being systematically stolen by officials. In a recent UNESCO report, the education sector in sub-Saharan African on the average gets only 5% of its gross domestic product (The Guardian 2011).

While these problems may likely persist in the foreseeable future, it will be difficult for Africans to build IR theories. And, the absence of a strong theoretical base from Africa limits how much impact African can make in the discipline. This is connected to the fact that although Africans interact continuously, immersing deeper into world affairs with the hope of bettering their lot, its policy makers are not likely to have clear ideas about how best it should relate with the world on its own terms and from its own theoretical standpoint. This has huge and double effects on African IR scholars whose interaction with IR literature are from Western oriented prism, but most of these theories that Africans engage with are dated. On the other hand, policies makes remain as navigate realists' anarchical world without compass. The proliferation of institutions studying IR in Africa will make no difference if thinkers are not produced to develop original ideas. Unless African IR

thinkers make theoretical contributions, they may continue to play fringe roles, that is if they play any role at all, in the discipline, the same way Africans states would not influence world affairs to its advantage if it does not look within itself for solution to its predicaments. It is important to state categorically that the problem is not of lack of resources, but commitments and will to seek creative ideas and pursue scholarship for the benefit of humanity. In order words, it is crucial for the state to take education as a priority and address some of the already known challenges.

If African governments appear helpless or remain irresponsible, as many have been over the years, are scholars to give up? My answer is no! The rest of this section examines how African IR scholars can contribute to discourses, theories and development of IR not just from an African perspective but a strong theoretical view. First, African IR scholars can tap into the study of History as a discipline as well as the history and events in Africa to make ground-breaking impacts in IR. One of the key lessons IR as a field has taught is its eclectic nature; IR draws from History, Political Science, International Law, Economics, Geography and Sociology and so on. Out of all of these established fields, History as a discipline is particularly important for the study of IR by African scholars because it is a detailed account of the past, where the contexts surrounding all the other subjects can be uncovered. History is crucial because “there is little reason to believe that the current state of historical evidence and judgment is definitive or final” (Smith 1999, 4). It refers to the aggregate of past events in general, or to the train of events connected with a particular place, person, culture, mentality, etc. But history also refers to attempts to represent or re-create those pasts. History may take the form of chronicle, annals, narrative, tale, story, or statistical analysis. History can help interpret “culture and politics with originality and flair” and unearth obscured events. For Africa, this is even necessary because, like the Oriental, there are there are so many prejudices against and myths about African that the study of history can dismantle (Said 1979)¹⁰.

It is therefore important that the IR discipline in Africa should reflect and be coterminous with the “facts on the ground” as they are experienced in a particular space and time. Furthermore, while there are events similar to those that necessitated the emergence of the IR discipline early in the twentieth century in Africa, such as the relevant incidents in the continent as in DRC, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, among others, these events are yet to be accorded the meaning they deserve by African IR scholars (Ofuho 2009, 77). It is abundantly clear that events in Africa can be utilised for the

¹⁰ Said's (1979) work is such a deconstruction of the perception of the Middle East.

purposes of generalisations as well as hypotheses and theory building or highlighting the roles of structures and agency in the making of a modern African continent. It is as peculiar as Africa is from the rest of the world that its theories are supposed to draw from its unique experiences and realities to develop these theories or highlight exploratory researches within IR in ways that explain these peculiarities as well as areas of convergence or hybridity with the rest of the world. Africa's slavery, colonial experience, decolonisation process and post-colonial statehood are sites of unquantifiable raw data. The waves of terrorism, violence, democratisation, and reforms are issues that have the potential to challenge dominant theories and discourses on and of Africa and Africa in relation to the world. It is high time these events gained a pride of place in scholarly endeavours.

The second point, which at the same time serves as an instance of the use of colonialism to develop a theory already in IR, is postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory serves as a viable and veritable entry point of engagement for African IR scholars to engage. Although the idea of an entry point through the postcolonial theory avenue is not to suggest that this is the only route by which African IR scholars can know IR from an African perspective. The choice of knowing Africa through natural or positivist perspective is a very good one for it would allow African scholars to engage in hypotheses development, making generalisations and engaging in theory building. Many African cases may be useful in this regard. An alternative is increasing use of social constructivist method, such as the sociological piece of work by Fanon, to provide a wide range of exploratory research on the constitutive nature of events in Africa. This is a veritable avenue for many African IR researchers interested in knowing IR to undertake. Moreover, one not-to-be-taken-away benefit of critical theory is its ability not to “recognize the limits of the discipline” but to extensively engage the study of international politics from different points of view taking into account history, context and contingency. “After all, the contemporary politics of the globe is examined in a wide range of fields, including geography, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and international law” (Zehfuss 2013, 146). Postcolonial theory as a strand of critical theory is further beneficial in that it addresses many issue areas such as those concerning identity, poverty, underdevelopment, civil wars and so on that are ignored or taken for granted by mainstream problem solving theory. Since the questioning of the validity of the knowledge produced by problem-solving theories and how such knowledge came to be are being scrutinised, critical theory has a lot to offer African IR scholars in unpacking their contributions.

Postcolonialism “analyses and challenges the complex power relationships between what is called the North (or West) and the South” (Zehfuss 2013, 156). Apart from the seeming marginal position of Africa that makes such a perspective appealing, the need to expose all forms and guises of insubordination, exploitation and marginalisation make it all the more relevant. “Postcolonial writings, working at the junction of a keen awareness of this empirical mismatch, on the one hand, and with a receptivity to the linguistic turn and to poststructuralist insights, on the other, have been especially open to the idea that knowledges may serve to constitute the worlds that they purportedly ‘represent’, ‘mirror’, ‘render’ or ‘portray’” (Seth 2011, 181). In this regard, Fanon’s works serves as a leading exemplar of works to draw from. According to Muppidi (2009, 150), “if international relations is an ‘American social science’ then Fanon provides a particularly different ‘locus of enunciation’ for international politics”. Fanon’s “locus speaks to and for the global majority, the ‘wretched of the Earth’, who are routinely, and often rudely, summoned to knowledge of international politics through the provincial terms”. Muppidi (2009, 150) proceeds that Fanon’s distinctive contribution, which is “to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” brings to bear on colonizing imaginations the weight of multiple ways of being human. Clearly postcolonial theory is not only an alternative to mainstream IR theories including Realism, Liberalism and Marxism, but much more indigenous to the Africa than dependency theories imported to Africa in the 1970s.

Conclusion

In this article I have examined the place of Africa in IR historiography. I argue in particular that Africa has merely mimicked studies from “abroad”, particularly the United States in how they do IR. While the challenge to the IR as an American Social Science provides an avenue to engage more broadly in discussions about the development of the discipline in IR, I provide avenues through which this can be done. In particular, I make reference to History and the use of African historical and topical events as being sites of raw data that could enhance the capacity to develop African-oriented IR theories as their contribution to the discipline. I argue that the postcolonial theory used in analysing the issue of colonialism and subordination of the Third World provides a good exemplar of how to make such contribution.

On a general note, one of the key takeaways of these turn to the review of IR's historiographical narratives is that IR has attained some measure of academic advancements and standards where different theories explore its meaning and interpretation of reality. This is essential for solidifying IR's robustness and status as an autonomous discipline within the social science. It is crucial to take inquiries into and attempts made to understand the historiography of IR seriously because, although IR may have acquired an autonomous disciplinary status, its history is incomprehensible without taking due cognizance of the interests and power relations that informed how its story has been rendered. It will also help in knowing how the knowledge it has subsequently produced over the years has shaped our world in a particular way. We cannot contribute to the change of the world without engaging these dominant perspectives in details. Interestingly, interests and researches in IR historiography have blossomed since around the 1990s, suggesting that there is more to be unpacked and explained in IR.

Lastly, IR has largely developed as an autonomous discipline but it is capable of utilising an eclectic approach toward understanding the world. This is both beneficial and disadvantageous. Where these external ideas and knowledge exposes social realities in ways that enhances our understanding, we are able to practice IR theoretically and in terms of policies better. However, where there is an over-politicisation of knowledge and knowledge serve private, perhaps commercial interests, it channels the discipline in a wrong direction, sometimes foreclosing opportunity for alternatives. The challenge is that it is always difficult to tell the difference between one and the other in a world where scholars are subjected to institutional, political and financial influences. Nevertheless, we can at least be optimistic that there can be a review of perspectives and since a history of such a field as IR or doing its current research is not an exercise towards reaching a consensus, there will be alternatives and differences. The alternatives would then show what could be done better even when we also know what we are doing right now and how we can achieve a normative as well as ethical theory and world.

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Interviews

Ojo, Olusola on 12 October, 2017.

ABSTRACT

This article examines what it calls Africa's International Relations (IR) historiography, an assessment of African scholars' contribution to the study of IR's history and discipline. This is done based on the myth surrounding IR's historiography, the rather limited role of African contributions and a set of criteria teased out of Schmidt and Bell's works on the writing IR. While they acknowledge Hoffmann's IR as an American Social Science, they suggest that a field's historiography must highlight obscured perspectives, researchers that self-consciously profess IR as their discipline and institutions that contribute to the development of the discipline. Although African IR scholars meet some of these criteria, including institutions and scholars that self-profess as IR scholars, the American hegemony and its European competitor/accomplice in the field greatly influence African scholars writings and the practices they adopt in the study of international relations. While African scholars bring African perspectives on global affairs to bare on the IR that they do, they mostly respond to theoretical, methodological and practical tones set elsewhere in doing so, some even countering these dominant views from "imported" theories, without necessarily developing African-oriented, philosophically grounded study on IR from the African perspective. Consequently, while African contributions to the discipline and history of IR appear marginal, African IR writers can expand their impacts by exploring the discipline of History – a view representing the eclectic nature of IR – and draw on African history and events to provide philosophical, theoretical and empirical insights to African IR study. While the postcolonial theory is an instance of such reflection, African IR scholars will make significant contributions to the field by introspection rather than reliance on Western-oriented canons.

KEYWORDS

Africa; IR Historiography; African perspective.

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