

HOW DOES POSTSTRUCTURALISM UNSETTLE TRADITIONAL IR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS?

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Abstract

As a critical perspective, poststructuralism blurs the boundary between criticising the theory and practice of international relations.

Poststructuralism is critical of the field of International Relations ("IR") in two distinct ways; it is sceptical of IR's state-centric level of analysis – advanced by liberal and realist IR theories – and is apprehensive of how these conventional conceptual lenses comprehend and explain the reasons behind states' actions. This paper explains and discusses how poststructuralism has unsettled IR's epistemological and ontological roots. Firstly, it applies the method of discourse analysis to global elite figures and their foreign policies. Secondly, it assesses Foucault's views on knowledge and power and shows how this unsettles IR theories' interpretation of the state and its centralised power. Lastly, it examines the concepts of deconstruction and genealogy to demonstrate how these have destabilised essential traditional representations and interpretations of the world and state within international relations. This paper provides illustrative examples revealing how poststructuralism has challenged IR's dominant state-centric realist and liberal theoretical frameworks, commonly used to explain the actions taken by sovereign states; additionally, examples of how international relations, the use of foreign policy and global politics are practised in society, are also interwoven as points of analysis, critiqued through a poststructuralist lens.

Keywords: Poststructuralism; IR theory; Discourse analysis; State-centrism

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This paper reveals the ways in which poststructuralism deeply destabilises IR's most

dominant theoretical frameworks, namely liberalism and realism, and illustrates its arguments with practical examples of how, in turn, this prompts us to question how state and non-state actors behave in practice in the political arena of international relations. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and other pioneers of the approach, such as Richard Ashley, Rob Walker and Jim George, poststructuralism emerged in the 1980s to "question how certain accepted 'facts' and 'beliefs' actually work [...] within International Relations" theories (McMorrow, 2018: 1). This approach destabilised IR's realist and liberal frameworks, regarded as the most prominent theoretical paradigms of the discipline (Genugten, 1999: 291). It challenged its positivist and seemingly fixed epistemological and ontological roots which were born out of the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia. Poststructuralism is critical of any analytical perspective that claims to know and explain an objective universal truth through one theory; the critical response perceives "truth and knowledge" as being "subjective entities that are produced rather [than] discovered" (McMorrow, 2018: 1). Seen as a critical approach rather than a distinctive theory, poststructuralism perceives theory and practice as interconnected, seeking to highlight alternative and excluded voices that have been marginalised in traditional IR theories (Zehfuss, 2012: 152). In turn, both the concept of 'IR', relating to the discipline's core theories, and 'international relations', referring to the practice and implications of global politics, are used concurrently throughout this paper to help supplement its central argument. Since IR theories attempt to explain the practical behaviour of the state and non-state actors in the international arena, this paper draws upon the core assumptions advanced by realist and liberal IR approaches, as well as upon specific examples of foreign policy and international relations practices,

to demonstrate that poststructuralism troubles these theories by questioning not only the nature and dynamics of these actors' practical interactions, but also our own perceptions thereof. Importantly, this approach engages with and rearticulates key concepts of knowledge and power, subjectivity and identity in IR. More specifically, poststructuralism challenges conventional IR perspectives in two distinct ways: it is sceptical of their state-centric level of analysis; and it is apprehensive of how IR's realist and liberal conceptual lenses reflect and explain the reasons behind states' actions. This paper focuses on how poststructuralism unmoors IR's epistemological and ontology roots. Firstly, the discourse analysis method is deployed in relation to global elite figures and their foreign policies. Secondly, Foucault's assessment of knowledge and power is mobilised so as to show how it unsettles IR theories' interpretation of the state and its centralised power dynamics. Lastly, the concepts of deconstruction and genealogy are examined to demonstrate how poststructuralism has challenged essential representations and interpretations of the global community and its constituent sovereign states within both the field and practice of international relations.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This section demonstrates how discourse analysis has unsettled mainstream theoretical frameworks of IR, such as liberalism and realism, through questioning the traditional modes of thinking and beliefs within these conceptual lenses. Rendering these beliefs open to alternative forms of knowledge and truth, discourse analysis has destabilised the Euro-centric nature of the above-mentioned theories through challenging the historical assumption that the creation of the sovereign state – and its subsequent hegemonic power in society – indisputably emerged from the events of Westphalia in 1648. It has also interrogated the dominant modes of truth in the international arena, governed by political figures and their foreign policies; discourse analysis has shown that these seemingly fixed truths and static binaries of us / them and

inside / outside are controlled and manipulated by the language and actions of these figures and of the wider institutions of government they direct. Consequently, they appear representative of this hegemonic mode of truth, marginalising alternative forms of truth and knowledge that are just as valid in the international realm.

Michel Foucault pioneered the concept of discourse analysis. He perceived discourses to “constitute the reality” of “what can be thought and said about the world” through linguistics (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 13). Foucauldian discourse analysis challenges IR by highlighting “the constitutive role of discourse in the creation of subject identities”, juxtaposing the historically fixed emergence of sovereignty and the state apparatus, previously regarded as the irrefutable and undisputed foundational truth of IR (Ashley, 1988: 231). Foucault perceives conventional forms of power – such as the powers of democracy in governmental rule, prisons, laws, the police and so forth – as being integral to discourses which constitute distinctive patterns of representational practise in which “meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made” through practices of language and speech (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 208). Hence, poststructuralists employ discourse analysis to readdress key concepts of representation, subject and state, showing how the theoretical premise, accounting for the creation of international relations in history – commonly associated with the Treaties of Westphalia – in reality, has no fixed foundation. The approach aims to move from “politics to the political”, where the first term denotes the “depoliticised” and normalised activities within given social structures”, whereas “the ‘political’ refers to the overarching social framework in which politics takes place”, where social paradigms are constructed and vie for legitimacy (Edkins, 1999: 170). Poststructuralism re-frames this process and re-presents political communities as fictional: there is no “real community” – only “fictional communities that underpin political thought” (Ashley, 1988: 6).

Poststructuralist scholar Richard Ashley utilises discourse analysis to explain what he calls “the anarchy problematique”.

This term denotes the traditional scholarly IR discourse depicting anarchy as an irrational and undesirable construction, in opposition to the concept of sovereignty, described as rational and inextricably connected to domestic state structures (Ashley, 1988: 6). Ashley refers to this as “heroic practice”, a process that allows states to be perceived as the central source of power due to their social construction. Decrying realist IR theories that relate state origins to the Treaties of Westphalia, – reinforcing a Euro-centric bias of IR to explain the evolution and development of the international world (Acharya and Buzan, 2019) – Ashley contends that this was not a fixed universal historical event for international relations but “was a moment of openness, a political moment” where the “absence of one social order had not yet been succeeded by the presence of another” (Ashley, 1988: 8). It is within this unstable foundation of the political community where the concept of subjectivity emerges; subjectivity infers the construction of our identity as a subject and how this interrelates to our notions of “common sense” and governmental rule in international relations, validated by certain discourses (Solomon, 2016). This historicised subjective openness, where we attach meaning to our identities, is shaped – as emphasised by Foucault – by dominant discourses through the performative nature of speech and language which creates ideas of new societies and identities within it (subject / state) as being something which appears unavoidable, legitimate and definitive – simply part of a natural historical practice (Ashley, 1988: 8).

Prior to the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia, this subjective openness, encouraging humans’ interrelated identity with the state, was evident in the history of Ancient Greece. The writings of Aristotle detailed references to the “polis” or “city-state”, seen as a form of association whereby individuals in the whole community from different class systems of the peasantry, middle and upper elite, share cultural, religious, political and economic wants, which could be met through their relationship with this loose association, providing their material and social desires (Miller, 1998).

Aristotle believed that this association was inextricably tied to the development of morality in the human character, and was “a certain ordering of the inhabitants of the city-state” (Miller, 1998). He perceived this constitution as coming into effect with an individual ruler, seen as ‘the sovereign power’ controlling this loose structural relationship. This individual – being from a position in high office, and being likened to the role of a craftsman in producing material goods – would become a “lawgiver”: bound with the duty of overseeing the general well-being and happiness of community populations (Miller, 1998). From a poststructuralist lens, Aristotle’s writings and observations of the historical events of Greece throughout this early period reinforced distinctive discourses of the individual subject and their dependable relationship to this early state-like formation (Miller, 1998). The classical writings of Aristotle largely validated and informed the formation of European political institutions; exemplifying the importance of written discourses in creating certain identities, such as the (subject / state) as being something which appears inevitable in history. Influential scholar Christian Reus-Smit’s (1999) research provides a thorough analysis of how different state systems animated by distinct purposes and objectives have emerged throughout history to govern interstate relations. In relation to the ancient Greek city-states system – and indeed several other more recent European communities of states – he emphasises the pivotal role played by unique cultural and historical settings in determining why different forms of governance emerge and are adopted at specific times in distinct places (Reus-Smit, 1999). Overall, his work, in alignment with a poststructuralist vein of thought, unsettles our traditional theoretical and empirical understanding of the emergence of the nation state, debunking conventional theories of IR which still dominate the field.

Poststructuralists have shown how the discipline of IR has been manipulated and controlled by certain forms of dominant discourses and individuals, as exemplified in the language used in global politics by elites who appear to represent “the regime of truth”

Foucault, 1977) hegemonic at that time and place. This Foucauldian concept refers to the language deployed by elite figures who are representative of state actors, hence, government leaders and its members – among others – who perpetuate distinctive meanings of truth and representational power that go unquestioned by most members of the societies they preside over, commonly serving these elite individuals' interests and those of their respective political parties (McMorrow, 2018). This idea contradicts a core facet of liberal IR theory in its moral argument that the state and its governmental leaders and interrelated figures play a distinctive role in preserving the rights and wellbeing of citizens in society, protecting their liberty against an unchecked and authoritarian political system (Haar, 2009: 20). This 'utopian idea' directly contradicts the traditional behaviour of several monarchs and their associates throughout the Victorian period who were known for their selfish and cruel governance, often side-stepping their citizens' desires and critical needs (Gold and McGlinchey, 2017). In turn, Foucault's concept challenges liberal IR theory by contradicting its optimistic view of the state and its relationship to the individual in society.

Various dominant discourses are illustrated in the foreign policies and political rhetoric used after the events of 9/11, during the so-called War on Terror (WOT), and in the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan of the United States (US) and its allies. The language employed by leading Western politicians, such as US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, reinforced the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy between Western and non-Western states, perpetuating a Euro-centric notion that Western states are representative of the most developed, peaceful and ideal nation state formations. Bush regarded Iraq, Iran and North Korea as constituting 'The Axis of Evil', thus castigating these countries as "international pariahs in contrast to the innocent [...] United States and its allies" (McMorrow, 2018: 2). The language employed by these powerful figures was endorsed by various media platforms that exaggerated the negative portrayal of Middle Eastern countries and "heightened the emotions of fear and

anxiety" (McMorrow, 2018: 3) of individual figures in the international realm – both political elites and individual citizens in society – during the WOT. Poststructuralists argue that such representations of enemy states and their civilians are strategically employed by Western politicians to legitimise their foreign policies and subsequent violence through forms of military intervention (Zehfuss, 2012: 155). In turn, these examples – revealing the practical implications of foreign policies and behaviour of states – show that the international environment is not anarchic by nature, with states being unchanging and fixed apparatuses throughout history, as is suggested by some IR realist theorists (Bull, 1977; Wendt, 1991). Instead, poststructuralism troubles these theoretical assumptions, revealing how the global anarchic political environment is not a static or unvarying environment, as is advocated by conventional realist IR theory; rather, it is sustained and created through the explicit and implicit actions of states and secondary actors – evidenced in the dominant discourses employed throughout the WOT. Hence, poststructuralists draw upon these dominant discourses of IR theory and how they interplay with the practical behaviours of state actors of foreign policies, aiming not to justify the atrocities that terrorists have committed, but rather to reveal how these continual international portrayals and categorisations of terrorists make "certain reactions and foreign policy actions more amenable" (McMorrow, 2018: 3) and instantly exclude any other forms of measures occurring in response to terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, poststructuralists reveal how contingent and unstable discourses are in international relations, unsettling the discipline's dominant theories and modes of truth-telling. This is evident in the shift of US presidential discourses in the WOT. The 2003 US intervention in Iraq led to mass dislocation and civilian casualties. Consequently, this propelled a backlash of American citizens demonstrating against the violent means of intervention employed by the US. In response to these demonstrations and societal pressures,

President Barack Obama used different military strategies and avoided using similar language as his predecessor to avoid explicitly announcing a state of war with the Muslim world (McCrisken, 2011). In other words, President Obama's leadership style differentiated itself from that of President Bush. From a poststructuralist perspective, this reveals an alternative public discourse in international relations which, alongside the array of anti-war protests after 9/11 and during the WOT, shows that "a plethora of discourses can coexist and craft the view of international relations that we are offered" (McMorrow, 2018: 4). This contradicts the dominant discourses and theories that appear representative of IR's primary framework of truth and knowledge, perpetuated by core realist and liberalist assumptions. Realism regards the international environment as a space of unchanging anarchy, where the state represents the ultimate power and often engages in war and conflicts with other state actors to preserve its survival. Liberalism views the international arena as a platform for positive global state collaboration and considers "coercion and violence [as being] counter-productive" (Owen, 1994) to achieve this universal aim. It perceives the role of the state and non-state actors, such as international organisations, as playing valuable roles in formulating this cooperative framework and in striving to attain peaceful outcomes and to avoid armed conflicts. However, both realist and liberal IR lenses reflect the image of the state as a dominant and perennial foundational power that governs the social reality of the world around us across time and space. Both theories do not directly challenge the existence of the state but instead, perceive it as simply a part of a transhistorical reality (McGlinchey et al., 2017). In opposition to this view, poststructuralism challenges these re-presentations by showing how several competing discourses are in play within international relations – evidenced in the examples of the WOT above – which aim to relativise and weaken the discipline's hegemonic statist discourses (McMorrow, 2018: 4).

POWER IN POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Another way that poststructuralism unsettles IR theory is through its approach to issues of power. Poststructuralism rejects traditional theories of IR that view power as something "that can be possessed" (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 12) and which derives from the state or individuals. Instead, poststructuralism views power not as something which exists inherently and can be harnessed, but as something which only exists because of and within relationships between entities. Foucault pioneered this alternative perspective on power. His analysis attempted to show how "there is no power", only "power relations" (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 12). He argued that "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1977: 93). Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge largely disrupts IR's traditional realist paradigm which explains power as being centralised within the state and its military capabilities (Morgenthau, 1951). Poststructuralism's assessment of power also challenges classical liberal theory's assumption that power is "established by a social contract" (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 1) between the state and its citizens. Instead, the approach deconstructs this traditional mode of thinking and perceives power as something that is neither centralised nor can be tangibly possessed (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 13). Foucault contended that knowledge and power are relational, they have a symbiotic relationship: "knowledge is inextricably bound up with power" (Merlingen, 2013) and is seen as representational power. Thus, when certain institutions or governmental members represent themselves as having the most appropriate knowledge to handle a certain situation, poststructuralists argue that they are exerting 'representational power'. Influential poststructuralist Jacques Derrida commented after the events of 9/11, that we need to be critical of international relations and governments' response to the events as their views claim to be definitive, legalising and legitimising a distinctive "interpretation that best suits [their interests] in a given situation" (Derrida, 2005). Poststructuralists contend that we need to look at the excluded and marginal responses to events like 9/11 to gain a more comprehensive

understanding of its overall meaning and impact in wider societal spheres (McMorrow, 2018).

Additionally, Foucault coined the term “disciplinary power”, a concept used to explain the process by which people only know something through “what it is not” (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 208). IR and state structures’ ability to create and entrench false dichotomies such as self vs. other, us vs. them, and external vs. internal world is only possible through this disciplinary power which “produce[s] a certain political subject” within societies through organising what people know and see as distinctive truths in opposition to “the marginalisation [and] exclusion of other identities and histories” (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 208). According to Foucault, power is not regressive but is productive; it “produces by structuring the possible fields of action” (Calkivik, 2017: 9). In turn, this process creates different practices of power within IR that deviate from conventional theories of sovereign state centralised power. Foucault locates past instances of historical sovereign power through its ability to control death; he contends that it has “a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself” (Foucault, 1990: 136). This perspective troubled modern liberals’ view of the contemporary state as a positive enabling apparatus, concerned with protecting and “ensuring the right of an individual person to life, liberty and property” within society (Meiser, 2018). Hence, in contemporary IR, poststructuralism regards state power as being composed of relationships of power, such as disciplinary power and biopower. Defined by Foucault, biopower is a distinctive form of political power that is in operation in multiple ways across populations worldwide. At the level of the individual, it focuses on controlling the body, its health, hygiene and general livelihood. However, on a public platform, complex practices of IR which are evident in institutions such as the army, schools, prisons, hospitals, and government policies attempt to control the public in diverse ways – and view populations as “mass [...] coexisting beings” (Calkivik, 2017: 9) – beings capable of control and global production.

From a poststructuralist lens, the current Covid-19 pandemic typifies a poignant example of the controversial nature of how nation states across the globe have exercised this form of biopower to suppress the spread of the virus. The language and rhetoric used by political figures, alongside the implementation of stringent policies controlling peoples movement across borders, has imposed various forms of responsibility and sacrifice on citizens worldwide. The speeches of many of these leading political figures have “positioned [individual people] as a key cause of, and solution to the problem” of alleviating the detrimental impact and spread of the virus (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al., 2020). This modern trans-boundaries’ means of governance employed throughout the pandemic exemplifies this form of biopower in action, evident in the explicit relationship created “between the state and the individual” to protect communities worldwide by means of ever-tighter tools of control (Larsson, 2016). Consequently, many have criticised and questioned this exercise of power, arguing that it is an abuse of political power, representing an infringement of wider international principles on basic human rights of people applicable in all societies. Through these concepts of disciplinary knowledge and biopower, poststructuralism unsettles IR theory by troubling realism’s conventional perception of power and by suggesting that power is a repressive, enabling tool central to the function of the state and its underlying material conditions. Instead, as suggested in the previous examples, poststructuralism shows how multiple public institutions – which are functionally separate from state control – are representative of distinctive forms of power which explicitly and implicitly control how societal populations function in the international environment. Poststructuralism thus unsettles IR realist theories – and, to a lesser degree, liberal perspectives as well – which primarily view the state as being the sole platform of power and authority endowed with agency in the international arena.

DECONSTRUCTION AND GENEALOGY

Another way that poststructuralism troubles IR's conventional paradigms is by deploying conceptual tools of deconstruction and genealogy. IR's dominant realist paradigm is embedded in logocentrism which is the belief that universal truths can be gained through forms of logic and reason (Edkins, 1999). However, poststructuralists reject this traditional assumption of knowledge and destabilise conventional forms of understanding concepts and norms within IR theory. Derrida pioneered the notion of deconstruction, an approach focused on assessing the implications of speech, language and meaning within writing which is significant in shaping dominant discourses and relations of power. Derrida's concept of deconstruction includes the strategy of double reading, a method used to "reread Western thought to give voice to which has been systematically excluded and silenced" (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 8). Thus, deconstruction unsettles IR as it reveals how "dichotomies are dangerous" (Devetak, 2005) and seeks to unsettle how these binary oppositions operate within IR theory – thus showing how they are "never neutral" and involve relations of power and "hierarchy" (Tayyar and Çetindişli, 2019: 10). In turn, poststructuralism, through its concept of deconstruction, unsettles liberal and realist IR theories in their conventional, and often one-dimensional representations of the international arena and of the state actors composing it. Derrida contended that such binary concepts, involving two comparisons of people, states, organisations, countries, and so on, are "political manifestations" (Zuckert, 1991: 341), often privileging the first concept in comparison to the latter. The former concept commonly denotes notions of purity, rationality, power and favour against the latter term, seen as inferior and marginal. These binary concepts are at play within IR theory in the discipline's distinctive views of the world. For example, poststructuralists argue that IR's realist theoretical notions of state sovereignty reinforce the inside/internal space – representative of the western state, order and rationality, in contrast to the outside world – typified by anarchy and conflict. These two

interpretations of the world mutually inform and reshape one another.

Hence, deconstruction is a useful approach to demonstrate how IR's static binary representations of the international and national produce harmful discursive interpretations of the world through constructing their identities (Campbell, 2013: 235). This is apparent in international relations' traditional representation of Africa, often marginalised in mainstream IR theories which concentrate "on the great powers" embodied by western nations (Brown, 2006: 121). Many poststructuralists have drawn attention to the visual imagery and political rhetoric concerning famines and crises in Africa. These images are embedded with distinctive ideas of a fictional geography where representations of the 'civilised/barbaric' and 'developed/undeveloped' are evoked (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 213). Focusing on the historical emergence of certain representations of peoples and nations is a critical approach adopted by poststructuralists, called genealogy.

Historically, western images of famines in Africa often focus on representations of starving women and children, typified by their passivity, innocence and hopelessness. Poststructuralism reveals how these images and discourses create an "established understanding of famine" without representing the true nature and experiences of famine zones. Poststructuralists relate this distinctive representation to western nations' colonial past which portrayed Africa as "a site of cultural, moral, and spatial difference populated by 'barbarians' [and] 'savages'" (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 215). The dominant concepts of IR theory advanced by realist and liberal perspectives, such as rationality, the state, and sovereignty rooted in the Treaties of Westphalia, as well as alliance / conflict dynamics within the international environment, are troublesome when applied to Africa. These Euro-centric and mainstream theoretical assumptions cannot explain and often do not acknowledge the historical specificity of the African experience, which predates the Treaties of Westphalia. Various historians and academic scholars have provided

evidence showing that “long before the imposition of the state structure, the African peoples had their modes of organising society, which were phased out because the continent did not have any choice but to adopt the Westphalian structure designed by European powers” (Ofuho, 2000: 106). Consequently, as mainstream realist and liberal IR theories cannot adequately explain the African experience within the traditional paradigms of Euro-centric IR theory, Africa is often represented as an ‘alien form of rule’ through its weakness and absence of hegemonic, centralised state structures. In turn, these representations in traditional IR theory largely influence how European public discourse chooses to represent Africa as a space that is inextricably bound with loose domestic control through the absence of a strong domestic state, enduring constant societal issues of starvation, disease and disorderly behaviour.

Poststructuralists question these representations, especially as Africa’s history does not fit neatly into mainstream IR theories; often regarded as a reason explaining why the academic discipline of international relations has historically chosen to ignore understanding the complex nature and history of African societies. Instead of perceiving Africa as a fragmented continent that deviates from the western norm, poststructuralists encourage the practice and theoretical assumptions of IR to create a more open understanding of “African participation in the international system as a way to open up avenues to a more historically-oriented theory of” (Brown, 2006: 127) IR. Poststructuralism importantly highlights how this continual representation perpetuated in IR theories and modern politics has harmful implications in promoting a negative portrayal of Africa to the wider world. The critical lens troubles IR through denaturalising conventional representations of different societies to show how these representations are not fixed and timeless but could have been different and therefore require “explanation” (Zehfuss, 2012: 154). Poststructuralist scholarship is important in showing how we need to move beyond “the representations [and] speak outside of the discourses that have historically constructed the North and the South” to ensure that

we do not become complicit in the consequences of these problematic representations (Doty, 1996: 170-171).

POSTSTRUCTURALISM AS PRACTICE

This paper shows how poststructuralism unsettles traditional IR theories – still commonly associated with realist and liberal perspectives – and the subsequent practice of international relations in multifarious ways. By re-addressing key concepts of the state, subjectivity, identity and power, this approach deconstructs traditional theoretical methods to re-explain and re-describe IR’s foundations and epistemological roots. In adopting a discourse analysis methodology, poststructuralists have challenged IR’s seemingly fixed historical origins and demonstrated how IR has created distinctive perceptions of the world and reality through its very own construction of dominant modes of discourse (Campbell, 2013: 235). Additionally, in providing alternative ways of addressing issues of power, poststructuralists have delegitimised IR’s conventional representations – perpetuated by realist and liberal frameworks alike – of power and its hierarchical centralisation of the hegemonic state. Instead, poststructuralism demonstrates how power is relational to knowledge and is achieved through the relational manipulation of dominant discourses over time. Through the concepts of deconstruction and genealogy, poststructuralism has importantly outlined how IR theory has created and moulded distinctive paradigms of power/knowledge and power relations – sustained through exclusion and marginalisation of distinctive actors and frameworks. For example, a way that the discipline could attempt to address this issue is if conventional IR theory incorporated the history of the African experience to ‘revise’ the discipline’s dominant realist and liberal paradigms, enriching and destabilising its still-dominant Euro-centric and state-centered theoretical model (Brown, 2006). Poststructuralism views itself as a critical positive approach which deploys distinctive meta-theoretical questions and thereby seeks to expose how traditional theories of IR have excluded “alternative accounts in the

process” – thus triggering serious implications for the practice of international relations, state actors, and foreign policies within the global arena (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016: 216). This is how poststructuralism dramatically unsettles IR's hegemonic realist and liberal theoretical lenses – both through re-analysing and re-presenting different interpretations of global politics and by providing important opportunities to engage with hitherto discounted, marginalised, and even silenced alternatives.

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