

The Politics of Identity in International Relations: A Poststructuralist Interpretation by R B J Walker.

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ABSTRACT

Post-structuralism has enormous effect on social sciences and the discipline of International Relations (IR) has undergone significant changes over the last few decades. The upsurge of 'Third Debate' in the 1980s highlighted the epistemological and ontological shifts in the discipline. Post-structuralism is one of the strands of post-positivist approach which is closely related to the works of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty and Jean Baudrillard. Scholars like Richard Ashley, James Der Derain, Michael Shapiro, R.B.J.Walker and David Campbell are some prominent figures who applied post-structuralist philosophy in International relations. Among them, the influence of R.B.J.Walker is remarkable. More than a mere theory or ideology, post-structuralist's questions all the established systems and continues to influence every sphere of life. There is an evident disregard for traditional attitude and 'absolutisation' in all walks of life.

#internationalpolitics #poststructuralism #internationalrelations

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has undertaken major changes over the last five-six decades. Post-structuralism made a significant impact on social sciences, especially in the social construction of knowledge and methodology in disciplines such as sociology, political science and international relations. Till this time, most of the IR questions were found to be methodological in nature. These issues became the 1950s and 1960s (Griffiths 83). However, since the 1980s, methodological issues have returned to the central stage in a major debate between positivist and post-positivist scholars. Post-positivism put forward the idea that the science of humanities should always be subjected to a critical analysis beyond a simplified scientific rationality (Smith 17). Positivism, however, gave the idea that the empiricist observation of the natural science can still be applied to social sciences. But post-positivism calls for a rethinking of the scientific rationality of positivism. Positivist methodologies, in fact, provoked post-positivist perspectives such as critical theory, post-structuralism, postmodernism and so on (Devetak63). All these perspectives are elaborate and complex, and there are internal disagreements and diversity among the advocates (Sayen and Ates 18). However, post-positivist approach rests on the proposition that people conceive, construct and constitute the world in which we live, including international society, which is entirely human structured. Post-positivists are critics of any claim of an established 'truth' (Devetak 186). For them, nothing in this universe is absolute and ultimate. The concept of 'truth' is thus

a negotiated one. As human being is the constructor of 'truth,' truth changes according to his/her views. Human beings themselves are a part of an evolution; then how can the theories or 'facts' found by them at a particular time of their study alone are constant, post-positivists ask (Osterud 385).

Rob walker is a luminary in the sphere of post-structuralist perspectives in IR theory. What makes him an outstanding intellectual voice in IR is his insightful post-structuralist contributions. Through his works Walker has broadened the areas in IR and made us to re-think the previously accepted methods of understanding. Rob Walker himself was influenced by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and so on but, among them, Derrida was the most prominent one. What Rob Walker did is an entirely different reading of grant theories in IR like realism, neo-realism etc with the tools which he borrowed from Derrida (George 269). Rob walker is one of the leading figures of post-structuralism and he has contributed widely to IR. His important works are, *One World, Many Worlds: Struggles for a Just World Peace* (1988), *Introduction: Speaking The Language Of Exile: Dissident Thought In International Studies*(1990), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (1993) and *After the Globe/Before the World* (2010).

Walker relies on Post-structuralist ideas as a vehicle for exposing the way in which orthodox international relations theory legitimates certain traditions and marginalizes others. In several articles, Walker has presented a deconstruction of

the discipline IR. His overall concern is to bring out the basic, ontological principles constituting International Relations as a theoretical and political realm (Jackson and Sorenson 237)

Walker's *Inside/outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (1993) utilizes Foucault, among others, to deconstruct the realist discourse around inside (sovereignty) and outside (anarchy). Walker argues that the realist construction of inside–outside is a thoroughly modernist resolution of the self–other relationship in modern spatial configurations. Walker's account of how state sovereignty constitutes a division between inside the state and outside the state is based on a deconstruction of IR texts presenting the "classical portrait" of IR, which is close to realism (Griffiths, Roach and Solomon 276).

Walker's (1993) work is significant in undermining the idea that state sovereignty will soon be transcended as a constitutive principle of international relations. He recognizes the growing weakness of its discursive power in an era of alleged 'globalization,' but he argues that there can be no substitute as long as we have yet to discover some postmodern means to overcome the contradictions of the modern world. His work is also important for those who believe it is possible to resolve long-standing 'great debates' in the field while retaining some autonomous identity for the 'academic discipline' of international relations (*Ibid*).

One of Walker's (1993) biggest contributions to International Relations discourse is his analysis of theories. Walker rejects the dichotomy between theory and practice, where epistemology is favored over ontology. Practice is "Theory-laden," inseparable, and a different theoretical approach will reveal different practical outcomes. A major input of post-structuralism to IR is a critical examination of the disciplines of dominant theories and concepts. Positivist scholars have a tendency to claim too much for their theories. Neorealism is a prominent example. Neorealism is a theory that suggests that only a few elements of information about sovereign states in an anarchical international system can tell us most of the big and important things we need to know about international relations. Post-structuralist IR theorists disprove the idea of objective truth. Neorealist may think that they have found the truth about international relations, but they are mistaken (Jackson and Sorenson 237). Post-structuralists enhance the belief that knowledge can expand and improve, thus giving us increasing mastery.

Deconstructing the Principle of State Sovereignty

State sovereignty occupies a special position in international relation theory as well as in political theory in Walker's writings (Devetak 48). He is concerned to bring out the ontological principles in

international relation as it is the key to open up the wider aspects in international relation (Hansen343). He insists on the state sovereignty as the central constitutive principle of modern political life. Explaining the principle of state sovereignty Walker describes that there are two political spaces in the modern world i.e. one within states and another between states. Inside state, there is justice, law, freedom and social progress which affect time which become one of progress and history (Walker 1984a). The idea of progress is different in international space as the repetition or the deferment of the continuation into eternity. The self-interested states or the lack of sovereign authority lead to conflicts and war.

The life inside states and relations between them are in fact oppositions. The concept of international relation implies the tact of politics between states. In Walkers concept of state sovereignty, there is a division between inside the state and outside state which is based on a deconstruction of international relation texts. It is very close to realism which emphasises the different character of inside and outside. He also criticizes idealism for its belief in fact that political community inside states is an extension to encompass the outside as well. These two approaches disagree to reach political community internationally. Both break the dichotomous conception of inside and outside and present them as different.

Dichotomies of Domestic/International

For Walker is an essential answer to the basic question of political identity as to "who we are" and "where we are". In his "inside /outside" Walker explains the conventional understanding of International Relations and returns to the important themes in identity - differences, inside-outside and time-space and parodies the familiar International Relations opposition. For him state sovereignty is long list of binary opposition that forms a distinction between inside and outside the state and are connected to one another. Inside refers to universality, unity, presence, identity and self and outside refuses to particularity, diversity, absence difference and other. The status of binary opposition is pivotal when evaluating the chance of altering the norm of state sovereignty (Walker 160). In Walkers writings three dichotomies are centred namely inside-outside, self-other and particularity-universality. Walker wishes to move beyond the binary oppositions.

Though the principle of state sovereignty is deconstructed we cannot assume that there are alternatives to the state sovereignty. Walker states that sovereignty is losing its ability as the spatio-

temporal resolution is firmly embedded in the fundamental critique of state sovereignty. Walker discusses that the norm of state sovereignty is losing its credibility as there is no eternal presence or imminent absence of states. The withering away of or preservation of the state sovereignty is not a methodological or epistemological question but an ontological one. Walker emphasises the difference between methodology and ontology he argues that we cannot deal with "how to study the state as we have not attempted to study what is state" (Walker 176).

For Walker, the principle of state sovereignty is a spatial resolution to relation between universality and particularity. There is an increasing significance of temporality as state sovereignty is always under attack. A transformation in time conception makes this principle unstable. In Walker's description of the sovereign state spatio-temporal resolution, time is one of evolvement on the inside and one of reappearance on the outside. For Walker, temporality can no longer be tamed within the territorial spaces of state sovereignty but in the territorial spaces of the state sovereignty will be challenged by the change of temporality (Walker 180). It is obvious that space and territory are connected in state sovereignty resolution. However it is less recognizable if Walker reflects that space and territory are always tied together in a "spatio-temporal solution".

CONCLUSION

IR post-structuralists bring an analytical lens to the study of world politics through different viewpoints about the conceptual term 'state.' Post-structuralists disagree with realism that sees the state as a unit that stays the same through history. For both realism and liberalism, state is the centre. Both were telling about their views about the state. One of the strengths of post-structuralism is its ability to call attention to the impact of ontological assumption on 'state.' That is, what the new way of looking at the state matters is, in order to develop alternative views on how politics is understood. Post-structuralists agree with realists that the state is the absolute centre for world politics. Post-structuralism at the same time deconstructs the role that the state plays in world politics and IR. State is something which changes with respect to time and space. It is within post-structuralism that the concepts like state are being rethought, rearticulated and deconstructed.

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