Global conversations: Relationality, embodiment and power in the move towards a Global IR

K A R I N M F I E R K E

School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews, Arts Faculty Building, The Scores, St. Andrews KY16 9AX

Email: kf30@st-andrews.ac.uk

V I V I E N N E J A B R I

Department of War Studies, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS.

Email: Vivienne.Jabri@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract: The 'global turn' in International Relations (IR), like postcolonial and decolonising approaches, moves away from the Eurocentric dominance of the discipline, and towards the inclusion of plural perspectives on global politics. The article investigates what such a call means in epistemological and ontological terms by focusing on the concept of 'global conversations'. In section I, we show that the concept of 'global' conversations necessarily shifts from an individual ontology to a relational ontology of intra-action within a global space. In section II we explore why 'conversation', as distinct from dialogue fits more comfortably with this relational shift and has practical implications for how the engagement takes place. The third section engages in an exploration of some of the obstacles to global conversation, and not least the emotional obstacles, in light of historically embedded and embodied relations of power that shape who can speak and who is silenced or heard. The final section then engages in a discussion of the types of practical engagement and research that might flow from this analysis. In moving beyond 'dialogue', the article reveals the intersection of power, language, emotion and embodiment in the constitution of 'global conversations', and how these in turn come to constitute the global, its normative structuring, contestations and transformation.

Keywords: Global IR; global; conversation; relationally; intra-action

The recent emergence of Global IR (Acharya 2014; Hellmann and Valbjorn 2017; Politics 2018; Wiener 2018) intersects with more long-standing critiques regarding the absence of non-Western influences on International Relations Theory (Acharya 2011; Acharya and Buzan 2007; 2009;

Chan, Mandaville and Bleiker 2001; Ling 2013a; Ling 2013b; Mallavarapu 2009; Qin 2007; Tickner and Waever 2009; Song 2001). It builds on postcolonial theory and decolonising perspectives that have sought to analyse the postcolonial condition, stressing the continuation of colonial discourses and institutional practices that underpin global inequalities (see, for example, Grovogui 2001; Jabri 2013; Sabaratnam 2017; Shilliam 2010), and further connects to debates regarding the limits of an individualist ontology and instrumental rationalism, and a turn to relational theorising (Barad 2007; Ling 2013a; Ling 2013b; Kavinski 2018; Kurki 2015; Qin 2016; Wendt 2015; Fierke 2019).

'Global' IR resonates with those who wish to see the provincialisation of the discipline's Eurocentric discourses (Chakrabarty 2000). But the larger question is one of how such a move is conceptualised, how we might think of the 'global', and the conversations this might entail. Almost 20 years ago, Chan, Mandaville and Bleiker (2001) pointed out that the limited geographic and cultural space from which the discipline emerged has profound implications for understanding the challenges of a new era. Most scholars of IR, they claimed, wouldn't know how to ask a question, relating, for instance, to Hindu or Buddhist cosmologies, regarding how agency relates to karma and fate. The issue is not merely one of recognising, as Acharya (2014: 634) does, the points of connection between 'this-worldly' and 'other-worldly' knowledge, between science and spiritual understandings of seeing and being. It is first and foremost one of rejecting any hierarchical rendering of knowledge systems and the view that while 'science' belongs to a rational West, the 'other-worldly' is necessarily of the rest.

Chan *et al.*'s claim about the limits posed on our ability to address the challenges of a new era is crucial. The failure to see or engage beyond the modern states system, or with the scientific discoveries and cosmologies with which practices in other times and places were intertwined, constrains our horizons for thinking broadly about how to address pressing global problems, and not least environmental deterioration or migration. While many of these problems emerge from practices that span a mere few centuries, the 'grave ethical failure in global security affairs' (Nyman and Burke 2016) raises a question of whether 'we' might actually learn something from an engagement with 'the rest' and systems of thought that sustained human life for millennia.

A concept of the 'global' raises significant and challenging questions related to ways of knowing and articulating that are not easily reduced to monolithic statements about particular cultures. It suggests a critique of the epistemological and ontological hierarchies that have informed the discipline and a recognition of plural methods and modes of interpretation

both within and across epistemes as they relate to the justification of knowledge claims. Recognising that a pluralist orientation implies 'encounter' and 'conversation' (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004: 17; Jackson 2011: 210–11), and pushing beyond Eun's (2018) question of whether IR should pursue dialogue and engagement across theoretical and spatial divides, this article explores a concept and method of 'global conversations' as well as some of the obstacles to its realisation in light of the embodiment and sedimentation of global relations of power over the past few centuries. We explore the normative, empirical and practical implications of 'global conversations'.

A concept of global conversations is needed at a time when both 'advanced' and 'new' democracies are threatened by a polarisation of argument that is destructive of reflection, deliberation and open-endedness. Having said this, our concern is not with the domestic politics of democratic states in the West but rather to highlight the extent to which global patterns of communication and power, and the epistemologies and ontologies from which they arise, have constituted anything but an ideal speech situation for large portions of the world, which over the past few centuries have been written over by the imperial practices of Western states, and not least those from which International Relations as theory and practice has emerged.

For instance, the construction of free and equal citizens has often gone hand in hand with the forced displacement and slavery of millions, as was most evident in the the U.S. context. As Lepore (2018) details, much of the historical contestation over the legal category of 'citizen' in the U.S. has revolved around a question of whether forcefully displaced Africans, Chinese immigrants or women could or should possibly qualify. Similar debates have taken place in societies across the globe where minorities and immigrants have often been at best second-class citizens. The increasing xenophobia, racism and intolerance that have accompanied political debates, and particularly migration, in the U.S., Britain and many European countries, only reinforces the point: In clinging to modes of argumentation and spatial organisation that rely on mutually exclusive terms, whether of belonging, rights or speech, the qualities of conversation that make democracy possible are undermined and ultimately destroyed. Our emphasis on conversation does not deny the importance or presence of contestation, and normative contestation in particular (Wiener 2008; 2014; 2018), but rather highlights a mode of engagement that has largely been lost with the erasure of the subjectivity of some both historically and as battle lines are more firmly drawn. The purpose of this article is to clarify why we will all be enriched by a conversation, as distinct from a dialogue, argument or debate, and why the conversation is necessarily, constitutively, global at this critical juncture.

The article is a conceptual exploration that grows out of conversation between the two authors, and others along the way, and is thus more conversational in style than is usually the case. While we refer to much that has been written on Global IR and related subjects, we do not provide an extensive literature review by way of establishing our place within disciplinary debates, which as Barkawi and Laffey (2006) note, are often more inward looking than outward. A number of studies have already provided devastating critiques of the Western biases of International Relations theorising and the unacknowledged influences of non-Western thought in International Political Theory (see earlier citations). We seek to examine what it means to engage in a more multi-perspectival exchange which places history in a longer-term framework, while addressing the multiple potentials for speaking, acting and rethinking our 'world of worlds' (Ling 2018) and how we engage with difference.

In section I, we show that a concept of 'global conversations' requires a shift from an individual ontology, to which any notion of 'inter' is attached, to a relational ontology of intra-action within a global space, while also problematising the frequent emphasis in Global IR on culture and regions. In section II we explore why conversation, as distinct from dialogue fits more comfortably with this relational shift and has practical implications for how the engagement takes place. The third section outlines the emotional obstacles to global conversations, in light of historically embedded and embodied relations of power that shape who can speak and who is silenced or heard. The final section highlights a research programme that might flow from this approach.

We present 'global conversations' as a concept and a method for a truly 'global' IR, exploring its ontological and epistemological terms, i.e. what constitutes conversation, who may take part and the relationship of conversation to power. The concept suggests language and discursivity, but also embodied encounter and the wider materiality of lived experience. As a method, 'global conversations' captures the relational, unfixed and open-ended aspects of a process of constitution that is global. As demonstrated by the suggested future research agenda, it has salience for the analysis of specific conversations as they relate to efforts to resolve shared problems in different contexts across the world, as well as those that relate to global constitutional transformation.

I. A global ontology of 'intra-action'

In his signature piece on Global IR, Acharya (2014: 657) intends to create a 'vibrant innovative and inclusive enterprise that reflects the voices, experiences, interests and identities of all humankind'. There is much in

the piece to admire, from the emphasis on a grounding in world history, to eschewing exceptionalism and recognising multiple forms of agency beyond material power. In this article, we raise a question about what it would mean to construct conversations that include the voices, experiences, interests and identities of all humanity, while also pointing to the obstacles inherent to such a process. While Acharya sees the need to address diversity, he is not very explicit about what this means in practice. International Relations itself is constituted in a language, and that language plays a role in setting the parameters for what can and cannot meaningfully be said or thought, as well as who can and cannot be heard. But perhaps the biggest issue, once one moves beyond monolithic categories of states, nations, regions or cultures, and representatives thereof, is what conversation is, why it is needed and who the subjects of a global conversation would be. In what follows, we seek to explore the idea that a conversation is an exchange between multiple parties that changes all who are involved. It is an 'intra-action', to use Karen Barad's (2007) term, that transforms the boundaries of difference and the world. As such, a conversation can be distinguished from dialogue, negotiation, and argument, as more established modes of thinking about communication within IR. Crucial to this shift is the distinction between an individualist ontology and a relational one.

The critique of the absence of non-Western influences on IR begins with a claim that scholars located in one corner of the world have narrated the rest of the world based on their own assumptions and categories, much as earlier colonisers wrote over cultures, subjects, etc. For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's, *In the House of the Interpreter* (2012), an autobiographical novel set in colonial Kenya, reveals the process of 'writing over'. Part of the author's childhood is spent at the coveted English School, 'Alliance', where the intention is to provide the selected Kenyan children with an 'English' education, while the world outside the school can only be defined as one of colonial violence and 'terror'. Ngũgĩ's classroom experience is one of the wholesale negation, even by the African teachers, of Kenya's landscape and the experiences of its inhabitants. As he states:

> I could not escape the magic of literature, its endless ability to elicit laughter, tears, a whole range of emotions, but the fact that these emotions were exclusively rooted in the English experience of time and place could only add to my sense of dislocation. Not every flower in the world was one of Wordsworth's host of golden daffodils. Kenya's flora and fauna, and the rainy and dry seasons, could also provide images that captured the timeless relevance of art, but we did not encounter them in class. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2012: 66).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's reflections within the walls of the schoolroom were, as he puts it, framed by the 'imperialist point of view', of history, literature and geography, while outside the perimeter fence and back in the village, the colonial authorities forcibly removed populations from their ancestral lands, while the ever-present watchtowers and checkpoints policed the population and governed the space and time of conversation and its potentiality for resistance. The 'epistemicide' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 3) of 'other' cultures derives from ontological hierarchies drawn in racialised terms. This implies a monologue where West not only speaks to the rest, with little dialogical exchange, but defines the parameters of the world within which they silently move. But if this were to change, who is the subject to be engaged? A concept of 'global conversations' raises the question of who speaks.

When Spivak (1988) asks, 'can the subaltern speak?' her intention is to critique those who claim to speak for the voiceless, the subaltern. While recognising the continuing importance of Spivak's question, Acharya (2014: 652) states that there are examples of the 'sub-altern' speaking, as well as resisting and acting, and that Global IR would open a central space for perspectives from this position. However, to invoke the 'global', as will be argued, does not in itself bring an equalisation of the discursive practices within the discipline, nor of the practices that are its subject matter. Subjectivity becomes crucial in this instance as it does in any understanding of conversation or dialogue. While pointing to the potential for more voices, including voices of resistance, there is a danger that culture or region, in the process, is treated as the property of discrete cultural identities, and representatives of these cultures as the bearers of these properties.

The answer does not lie in shifting to an emphasis on individuals. In a highly mobile global context, it is difficult to think of either individuals or states as containers of culture. Global mobility and migration mean that any one individual may be the product of multiple cultures, whether historically or in the present. The global context is replete with multiple and intersecting cultural manifestations that are apparent in practices from the Saudi who prays kneeling toward Mecca before boarding an airplane to the incorporation of Tai Chi or Yoga in the healing of PTSD in the US military or in Brazilian prisons. The point is that practices originating in different cultures find expression in 'modern' society. As Shilliam (2015: 13) notes, even beneath the wounds of coloniality, which has tried but never entirely succeeded in separating peoples from their pasts, there is something to be retrieved. Cultural references, as realms of meaning, knowledge, and affect, are mobilised in encounters with others and the world, inform identities and practices of identification, and can express solidarity or adversity.

Engaging with the practices of another culture can be an act of resistance and dangerous, which is a subject to which we will later return. The central point here is that culture is neither static nor contained. Culture cannot be possessed or owned, but is an ongoing and changing performance in relation to others.[1] Discursive practices are imbued with the not so easily captured aspect of lived experience, namely the emotional lives of participants in conversation; and particular words and forms of expression that change as they travel. Patterns of speech and silence are emotional, embodied, and bound up in historical patterns that form the backdrop of conversation, which raises an important question of how assumptions of race, culture or gender become bound up in the power dynamics of speech.

Culture is more often a product of narration than a container of properties. One might speak of cultural practices, which have their historical origins in particular places, but this too is somewhat murky. If Buddhism, for instance, is taken as a practice, its origins would go back to the Buddha in India, but that which is referred to as Buddhist practice, can be quite different in the context of Tibet, Thailand or China, given that this philosophy travelled along the Silk Roads, merging with other practices, related for instance to Daoism in the context of the latter. Or, as John Hobson (2004) has explored, a range of technologies and practices were first discovered outside the West before travelling there, after which they acquired new ownership. The problem of how one studies culture, and how it changes as it travels and merges with other cultures, is complex. It suggests the challenge of bringing culture in and what it means to speak from a position outside the existing academic discourse of IR.

The Global IR literature begins with an important critique that thinking about the International has been heavily framed in one cultural location. The latter is based on a language and assumptions that have often marginalised insights from other corners of the world or orientalised them as romanticised folklore, which, it is often assumed, we can dismiss before looking. In this respect, a body of literature that has constituted IR, and which claims to say something about how the world works is very much an ethno-centric discourse (see e.g. Booth [1979] 2014), which is limited by its indebtedness to a particular notion of science and assumptions of universality. These assumptions rely on a very contained understanding of history, which usually begins in Europe in 1648. The idea that the unitary

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[1] See Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Mistaken Identities', Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4, November 2016, for a powerful discussion of the multiplicity of identities within cultures. On the politics of cultural identification as the basis of solidarity as well as vilification, see Gilroy (2004) and Jabri (2007; 2013).

approach to science, developed in one corner of the world, is uniquely capable of capturing 'truth', thereby making other approaches inferior – for instance, reflectivist, interpretivist – has its roots in a way of thinking that cannot be said to celebrate diversity.

The problem lies less with science itself than an approach to science that relies on particular metaphysical assumptions that equate it with the only approach to truth, or that fails to recognise the historical contributions of other cultures. For example, in the tenth to eleventh-century Islamic world, we see conversations focusing on the theme of science and religious belief, a relationship that preoccupied the then Asian and Eastern worlds, and one that emerges and re-emerges up to the present. A specific conversation of interest in this context has been revealed in the correspondence between Ibn Sina (980–1037) and al-Biruni (973–1048), in central Asia, which anticipated evolutionary geology and was concerned at the same time with how their scientific deliberations related to matters of faith (Starr 2013: 296–302). One might also explore the thought of the Arab Scholar Ibn Khaldun, who created a dynamic model of economic development, articulating ideas that were similar to those of Adam Smith, yet preceded him by hundreds of years (Oláh 2017).[2] Further, while universal concepts of dignity and rights are often identified with Western thought, one might explore the origins of the concept of 'dignity of persons' with the Haitian and anti-colonial revolutions, which have been considered to be insignificant politically (Grovugui 2001: 437).[3]

While most social scientists probably embrace the importance of multi-culturalism, the resistance to diversity beyond Western academic practice, or the tendency to marginalise or not even consider scholarship that has emerged from other corners of the world, or during different historical eras, reinforces a West/non-West binary. Global IR seeks to transcend this distinction, however the danger of reconstituting the discussion around cultures or regions relies implicitly on an individualist ontology by which parts exist in separation from other parts, and where difference becomes a matter of logical contradiction and hierarchy. In this respect, we wish to push beyond Hellman and Valbjorn's (2017) call to 'recalibrate' the 'inter' in international relations, as part of a shift from interaction to 'intra-action'.

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[2] Western scientists have engaged in a rich dialogue with the Dalai Lama regarding shared and differing assumptions of these two traditions of inquiry, i.e. Western science and Buddhism.

[3] The 'dignity of persons' in this context included the right to not be someone else's property, not be flogged, not be denied a family or the right to testify in court, not to be raped, murdered or sold.

Inter- and intra-action

The significance of this ontology, and its relevance for thinking about the global, is perhaps best understood in terms of Karen Barad's (2007) concept of 'intra-action', which begins with the 'cuts' by which difference is defined within wholes. Intra-action is different than interaction. The engagement between separate cultures, each assumed to have an intrinsic identity, would be an 'interaction', in which separateness is the point of departure. Der Derian's (1987) discussion of modern diplomacy is consistent with this concept in so far as the estrangement between separate states is the basis for diplomacy between them.

'Intra-action', by contrast, begins with the whole and examines the processes by which boundaries of difference and with them cultures are produced *within*. This is not to deny that the interaction between states or regions, or the interaction between West and non-West, are an important part of this boundary-making process but rather to resituate the process and how it happens from the perspective of the whole, which would necessarily require a shift away from an emphasis on universalising discourses identified with the West to an examination of, for instance, the historicity of narrative erasures of race and the constitution of boundaries between the assumed human and sub-human (see Grovogui 2001; Gani 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Barad emphasises the importance of attention to detail, which suggests the need to look more closely at the boundary-marking processes themselves, and at the complexity, and, we would add, their role in reproducing states, the West/non-West distinction or neo-colonial relations of power. One might alternatively draw on the symbolism of the ancient Silk Roads, or the construction of their modern equivalent, to think about what it means to say that cultures engage along it (see Ling and Chong 2018).

Barad's intra-action resonates with the theory of relationality articulated by Qin Yaqing (2016),[4] which highlights the contrast between the ontological individualism and its emphasis on rationality, shared by the main systemic theories of IR, i.e. structural realism, neo-liberal institutionalism and structural constructivism, on the one hand, and a relational ontology, on the other.[5] A relational metaphysics is characterised

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[4] A relational ontology was first explored in IR in 1999 in a seminal article by Jackson and Nexon (1999) which focused primarily on American debates, and did not extend to non-Western thought.

[5] While Qin's theory of relationality builds on Confucianism, a similar ontology is evident in Buddhism and Daoism, as well as Barad and Wendt's quantum argument (Barad 2007; Wendt 2015; Fierke 2017), or feminist theories such as the Global Ethic of Care (Robinson 2016), and can be seen in recent developments in ethical security studies (Nyman and Burke 2016).

by fluidity and movement in continuously changing events and relations rather than discrete objects and entities, where 'overlapping relational circles link people through relationships based on social difference' (Qin 2016: 35). The self, far from possessing an absolute and independent identity, is entangled in relations to others, which are continuously constructed and reconstructed. Identity and speech are fundamentally linked to context, where the meaning of any one cannot be detached from the whole. Rationality, far from emanating from an individual mind is bound up in relation to specific others. These relations are continuously in motion which highlights the importance of process, and an open becoming, rather than the reasoning of a fixed entity. Qin's analogy to ripples in a lake places the actor at the 'center of concentric and overlapping relational circles, each ripple signifying a degree of intimacy and no clear boundaries existing between the ripples' (Qin 2016: 37)

Beginning with a concept of 'global', rather than 'cultural', moves us away from thinking in terms of the inter-action between a priori parts as containers of culture, and towards a more relational ontology of entanglement where parts are continuously defined and redefined within a global space that is continuously in flux, where identities and relationships transverse space and time (see Fierke 2017). The subject is never static, nor does she speak from an Archimedean point in space but always in relation to others. The interaction/intra-action contrast forms a backdrop for thinking about the meaning and need for global conversations and how this builds on and can be distinguished from dialogue, negotiation or other modes that are more developed in the literature.

II. A relational epistemology of conversation

The call for a pluralisation of the discipline is captured in works that advocate a 'comparative' and a 'dialogical' perspective.[6] The latter assumes the potential for dialogue across difference. The 'comparative tradition', as Shilliam (2010: 3) highlights, is one that concerns 'engaging with – rather than ignoring – non-Western political thought in a manner that is not beholden to colonial ideologies that drain the non-Western world of

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[6] See, for example, Dallmayr (2004). The field of comparative philosophy, and specifically comparative political theory, is dedicated to investigating the differences as well as continuities between different philosophical traditions of epistemology and ethics. See, for example, Larson and Deutsch (1988). The 'comparative' approach in IR is devoted to culturally specific interpretations of categories; for example, on 'modernity', see Shilliam (2010), and 'war', 'peace', 'power', and ethics in Chan *et al.* (2001). For a comparative perspective on the ethics of war, in 'secular' and 'religious' perspectives, see Nardin (1996).

all significant content for the study of modernity which is now, and perhaps was always, integrally global'. The effort to 'provincialise' IR (Chakrabarty 2000), assumes a comparative and a dialogical perspective that does not subsume non-Western discourses, nor render them amenable to the discipline's epistemological and ontological limits.[7] The 'comparative tradition' moves us away from the pitfall highlighted by Chakrabarty, whereby the 'empirical domain' (that of 'other' cultures') is considered subordinate to universalising 'theory' that is seen as the remit of the Western academy. However, as emphasised in our argument, what is considered to be 'knowledge' of the world, its epistemological framing, is itself constituted by contingent and relational structures and dynamics that inform being in the world. As indicated above, definitions of what is considered relevant or even legitimate rest on hierarchies, dominated by the West. Our focus on global conversations, reveals these assumed hierarchies, as discussed in the next section, but goes beyond both critique and pre-inscribed versions of dialogue.

While existing models of 'dialogue' assume rules and norms of valid communicative practice, they are often so abstracted from lived experience that their candidacy for global conversation is questionable. The concept of 'dialogue' is itself contested (see, e.g. Valbjorn 2017), but the point here is to move beyond prescriptions of what constitutes 'ideal-typical dialogue', towards a recognition of conversations (plural) as open-ended relational wholes, the constitution of which might be revealed through the method we present. Habermasian discourse ethics, which seeks agreement based on assumed universal rules of validity (Habermas 1992) is one ideal-typical model and an example of what we wish to move away from. Habermas recognises, in response to critics, that participants in dialogue come with 'hermeneutic starting points', albeit ones that could be put aside as participants move beyond these in their 'rational' effort to reach normative agreement.[8] This 'putting aside' fails to acknowledge the rich and diverse sources of knowledge, reflection, and awareness that might be mobilised in a relational understanding of conversation. Edward Said

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[7] The mainstream, as Sabaratnam (2011: 782) highlights, 'has been slow to pick up the emergence of a movement in the discipline that extends dialogue itself as a critical strategy for thinking about the world'. She suggests various 'decolonising' moves that would open a Eurocentric IR to 'conversation' about world politics. See also Hutchings (2011) on the politics of the Western/non-Western dichotomy and its implications for thinking about 'dialogue' in international relations. Pinar Bilgin (2014), writing from the perspective of critical security studies, suggests a conceptualisation of 'civilisational dialogue' in terms of 'co-constitution'.

[8] In response to critiques of his universalist assumptions, Habermas (1998) introduced a radical shift in his articulation of discourse ethics, increasingly stressing 'lifeworld contexts' as implicated in the potentiality of 'agreement'.

(1993: 336) reminds us of the 'silences' that permeate some strands of critical theory. As he states, 'we have today's leading Frankfurt theorist, Jurgen Habermas, explaining … that the silence is deliberate abstention: no, he says, we have nothing to say to "anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles in the Third World", even if, he adds, "I am aware of the fact that this is a euro-centrically limited point of view".' Said wants to highlight the internal contradiction of this admission. A conversation here does not seem possible.

A method of global conversations draws attention to practices of language use, interpretation, and the mobilisation of situated knowledges as not only philosophical, but crucially 'anthropological' (Latour: 1993), or sociological (Hamati-Ataya: 2018).[9] It suggests liberating epistemology from prescribed edicts that claim the universality of validity and criteria of judgement, as well as from 'standpoint' epistemology, where the subject invoked is somehow predetermined in gender, class, or cultural terms.[10] Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 3), writing in the African context, speaks of 'epistemic freedom', or the 'right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Euro-centrism'.

In seeking what he refers to as a 'cross-cultural orientation', Fred Dallmayer (2004) highlights hermeneutics and phenomenology as distinctly dialogical. As shown by political theorist, Hwa Yol Jung (2002), the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions might be engaged in conversation with, for instance, the Latin American Enrique Dussel or the Vietnamese philosopher, Thich Nhat Hanh, to the end of unravelling what a 'relational ontology' might mean in a political theory and how these inform practices of knowledge production and relationality that are closer to lived and embodied experience. Particular modes of conversation or conversational style cannot be privileged over others, nor is it possible, in a relational model of conversation, to advocate what Iris Marion Young (1996: 124) has referred to as 'dispassionate and disembodied' speech. Articulations of knowledge, their idiom and style, are as significant as the contingencies of experience and the rich fabric from which and within which frameworks of knowledge and understanding emerge.

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[9] Where Latour (1993) suggests an 'ethnology' of knowledge production, Hamati-Ataya's (2018) sociological approach directs attention to the mutually constitutive relationship between knowledge and wider social dynamics of production and reproduction.

[10] Standpoint epistemology is conventionally associated with 'standpoint feminism' (Hartsock 1987), though the term was used by György Lukács (1967 [2000]) in relation to the 'standpoint of the proletariat'. On the potential of 'stretching beyond' situated knowledge, see Kurki (2015).

To invoke idiom and style in our understanding of conversation is to suggest a move away from the boundary between practical/moral reasoning and aesthetics that Habermas defines as the condition for universality. If anything, such a boundary imposes limits on conversations that are imbued with experience and context and hence with creative potentialities. There are styles of conversation and what Christopher Norris refers to as the 'expressive surplus' of language.[11] These cannot be tamed by a priori rules of communication, but emerge in unfixed and unpredictable forms (see Norris 1996: 100), raising the question of how such surplus might be captured across different languages. Gayatri Spivak (2000: 15) writes of translation as 'necessary but impossible'; necessary in the sense that we seek some kind of generality in communication across difference, and yet impossible in that capturing the other's idiom must always remain a 'conscientious approximation'. The specificity of idiom holds any effort at translation to account. To capture idiom is to reveal something of the lived context from which and within which it has meaning; a literal translation of Rumi's poetry, for example, would miss the idiomatic expressions that derive from a sense of place, background texts, or even social mannerisms.[12]

As Spivak highlights, English is always assumed to be the generalisable semiotic of the public, while idiom is the particular or the historically private, and this to her, as the writer who translates, constitutes the political violence that is the potentiality of translation, but also its moment of ethical responsibility: 'No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate' (Spivak 2000: 22). Spivak reflects on 'translation' and claims that speech is always co-present with hearing. Yet the latter is never in a position to finally determine or fix in meaning that which is articulated in conversation. Conversation is thus constituted in language, and depends on the very potentiality of language, but such potentiality cannot be governed by universal rules. As Spivak suggests in her engagement with the question of translation, the challenge is to 'hear' the particularity of the idiom by giving it priority; placing it before the 'generality' of semiotic rules.[13] Such reversal has the consequence not just of placing the uncertainty of meaning

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[11] 'Expressive surplus' of language (Norris 1996) points to the idea that words/concepts are never simply contiguous with a reality; the excess can be found in what is unsaid or even expressed in styles and idioms not easily reduced to formulaic rules of communication.

[12] There are multiple translations of Jalaluddin Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet. However, most are deemed to have extracted references from the Koran in his poetry. See Rozina Ali, 'The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi' *The New Yorker* (5 January 2017).

[13] Spivak uses Derrida's deconstructive method (1981) which rejects the hierarchical dichotomies of Western metaphysics – the universal and the contingent, reason and emotion – but also enacts their reversal.

(Derrida in Bernstein 2008: 580) centre-stage in conversation, but would constitute an acknowledgement of the situated and lived aspect of conversation, its worldly reference points.

A conversation neither requires consensus, nor does it dispense with opposing points of view. One meaning of the root 'converse' as a noun or adjective points to the role of opposites. So, for instance, a claim that 'if culture is properly global, then the converse is also true: the global is properly cultural', draws on the root converse to point toward an opposition. Or as an adjective, 'the only mode of change will be the slow process of growth and the converse process of decay', again points to an opposition.[14] If one looks to the origins of the term ('to live among, be familiar' in late middle English, or to keep company, in the Old French *converser*), the emphasis shifts to being a part of each other, similar to the intra-action, where that which divides, and constructs opposites, happens within relations of parts to a whole. The intention is neither to eliminate difference, as difference is necessary for an interesting conversation; nor is it to achieve unity. The intention is rather to place the relational dynamic within a whole where the parts do not exist in total isolation and alienation, and the conversation is ongoing.

Wittgenstein (1958) speaks of the difficulty of finding one's feet in another culture, where one does not speak the language, a point that is illustrated by Clifford Geertz's (1973) famous example of the Balinese cockfight. How would we as outside observers begin to make sense of this practice in the absence of some knowledge of the cultural rules by which its meaning is constituted? The example points to the difficulty of conversing with someone who speaks a different language and comes from a very different culture. You can actively wave hands at an other, pointing to objects, miming subjects, but the conversation will be limited. But, of course, at the international level we all speak English and any IR scholar is familiar with the categories of IR in English, so problem solved! Problem reproduced, more likely. While British colonisers, among others, often legislated against the use of local languages, not least in Ireland and Scotland, this was not first and foremost about making society function more smoothly. It was about making society function according to a set of externally imposed rules, which reinforced the power of the imposing party on that society. In this respect, the language within which a global conversation takes place is a container of power in itself, which both makes the conversation possible while communicating who is in charge. Hierarchies are embedded in language itself, including the kinds of assumptions that are made, prior to any kind of opinion (see, e.g. Said 1978

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[14] <en.oxforddictionaries.com>.

on Orientalism), which shape notions of entitlement and who can speak, who is heard, and who is silenced.

Questions of entitlement to speak arise not only from positioning in First World or Third, but also constitute the position of authorities, and not least academic experts, vis-à-vis others, which may start with the authority of the Western 'scientist' vis-à-vis non-Western scholars, but extends further to the 'scientist' vis-à-vis the 'shaman' or 'Buddhist monk'. To what extent are the assumptions of Western science so engrained, even among critical scholars, that talking to other traditions of thought or even engaging with academics outside the US and UK, is problematic, given assumptions regarding the superiority of Western institutions and the scientific method?

III. Emotional obstacles along the way

Arguably, much of the work needed for a more equal conversation to be possible is of an emotional nature for it is not merely that assumptions embedded in language often form hierarchies of one kind or other, but that these have been historically embodied, shaping a global emotional landscape.[15] Along this landscape, those who speak do so from the mountain top, while those who are not heard have been pushed into the valley, which is not merely a function of West and non-West but race and gender as well. The main point is that hierarchical patterns of speech are inseparable from and enable historical practices which have made some bodies, more than others, susceptible to exclusion, violence, bondage or dislocation. The memories of these experiences persist, as do the practices, and are embodied as well. In this respect, a 'conversation', while among the most fundamental or primordial forms of intra-action, is more than just the exchange of language. As Katz (2012: 27) notes, lived experience is a three-dimensional reality and 'If we are to understand the rise and fall of emotions in social life, we need to keep the moving line of intertwining between self and other (or world) at the centre of our investigation.' This returns us to Barad's (2007) point about intra-action, that is, that the 'cut' by which difference is produced represents not a complete separation but an intertwining, an entanglement, which is material as well as discursive.

Within this three-dimensional reality, embodiment, emotions and speech are all related areas, which, in the case of conversation, will be part of a

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[15] This neither does away with rationality nor does it prioritise it. The work of the neurologist Damasio (1994) suggests, emotion and rationality cannot be neatly separated, as is often assumed.

relational intra-action. For instance, how one reacts emotionally to what is said registers in the affect of the body. How one communicates, how the body is held or how the other is embraced or not are shaped by culture. An interesting programme (Going International 1983), used in the cross-cultural training of diplomats and businessmen and women in the 1980s, demonstrates various forms of embodied communication that can throw a cross-cultural conversation off balance, from the Western businessman who in a meeting with Arab counterparts, displays the soles of his shoes while sitting on the floor, to the American manager, who, in the collegial environment of Japanese business culture, elevates a single worker but cannot then understand why the team thereafter became less productive. Both are emotional encounters that shape the potential for conversation. The main point regards the importance of sensitivity to and respect for cultural difference and of making an effort to acquire knowledge of basic principles of social interaction within a culture that is not one's own.

But the problem goes much deeper if one considers the day-to-day intra-actions that have shaped the 'cuts' by which entire societies are defined. One thinks here of comments by African-American residents of Charlottesville, Virginia, in the aftermath of the highly visible display of white male power in August 2017. Residents of Black Charlottesville said they had 'seen it all before' (Newkirk 2017). The activities of white supremacists were a reflection of attitudes that continued to impact on the day-to-day experience for many in a country that has not reconciled with its history of slavery. The example raises a question about the emotional impact of the everyday bullying of particular groups of people over a long historical period. Or the impact not only on bodily health, but on social communication, of continuously being lowered and how this can limit the potentials of a category of people long beyond any formal institutions of slavery, or other institutional forms that deny autonomy have ended.

A brilliant example, explored in some depth by Sarah Ahmed (2004: 53), comes from the African-American feminist Audre Lorde, who provides an account of her encounter as a child with a white woman on a train to Harlem. During the encounter the white woman stares at the black child and, as her gaze drops down to the space between them, the child's gaze also follows, while the woman pulls her coat closer to her. The child, wondering about the source of this response, imagines a cockroach in the space separating them, as the horror communicated by the woman suggests a very bad presence. So the child too pulls her snowsuit closer, but then realises that there is nothing there and that it is she rather than anything on the seat that the woman doesn't want to touch. The child is confused and doesn't understand the women's flared nostrils, or her hate, but never forgets it.

In Ahmed's (2004: 54) argument the white woman's refusal to touch the black child does not simply stand for the expulsion of blackness from white social space but actually re-forms that social space by re-forming the apartness of the white body. As such the skin registers the threat posed by the bodies of others to bodily and social integrity, and comes to be felt as a border through the violence of the impression of one surface upon another (Ahmed 2004: 56). In this respect, emotions are not purely psychological dispositions but involve an investment in social norms, raising a question of how subjects and others become invested with these norms and how they come to be experienced as both meaningful and natural, thereby shaping the space of intra-action. It is not only that the black body, in Lorde's story, is pulled down to the white woman's gaze; it is also transformed into an object of its own gaze. As Ahmed (2004: 59) states, 'the hated body becomes hated, not just for the one who hates, but for the one who is hated. She comes to recognize herself as the object of the woman's hate.' The hate becomes, so to speak, 'sealed' into the skin, thereby assuming the character of the negative. As the signs are repeated in intra-action after intra-action, they become the effects of histories that remain open.

As the hate is sealed into the skin it may take less than conscious form. This goes beyond the question of whether one can ever be 'heard' by the other, to the ability to speak at all. Damasio (2000) makes a distinction between emotion that is unconscious and present at all times and feelings that represent an awareness and conscious understanding of emotion states. The distinction for him is fundamental as it is only when an individual comes to feel a feeling that emotion begins to emerge into conscious awareness. Catherine Theodosius (2012: 78–83) recounts the case of an aid who is bullied at work. She experiences emotions in response but suppresses them because it would be inappropriate to express them. As a result, the body undergoes a physiological change. She attempts to cover over the feelings but they are visible in the way that she carries herself, the creases in her face, and the non-verbal communication processes in her body, all of which provide evidence to the nurses that their action has been effective. An awareness of unacknowledged shame due to the bullying, also isn't recognised as such but rather as feeling unwell. To manage and make sense of her feelings, the aid stokes and successfully induces anger, while also having to suppress that anger. Nonetheless, the minute physiological changes produced by the unconscious are on display, so too are the 'hidden' feelings of shame and anger. The aid then actively embodies her subordinate place among her colleagues, simultaneously inducing, expressing and suppressing emotion. Although she is not entirely cognisant of her emotional state, her anger has a

physical expression, which is acted out along with unacknowledged feelings of shame, both of which become central to the social intra-action. As the aid becomes increasingly unable to manage the emotions, she experiences an outburst of anger, and feels different. The outburst is triggered by a discussion about the people who have been bullying her, by which she makes a conscious connection between the bullying and her belief in her nursing abilities and the shame and distress this elicited in her. While she had doubted herself, she makes a narrative link that allows her to acknowledge the impact of the bullying, thereby making sense of the feelings this produced.

The point of recounting this one incident in some detail, is to raise a question about the impact of an ongoing experience by entire populations of being bullied, whether in the context of colonialism, slavery, or other structural forms of violence, and its potential impact on the ability to speak and subsequent behaviour not only historically but on successive generations. The literature on historical trauma has highlighted the negative health consequences on successive generations of, for instance, Native Americans, as well as the persistence of structural violence against these communities (e.g. Brave Heart 2000; Gone 2013; Maxwell 2014; Prussing 2014). Conversation requires acknowledgement of these dynamics and some attempt to address them, along with the structural violence.

Understanding the workings of affect in the personal experience and in the construction of distinctions sheds light on the question of whether the subaltern can speak, or for thinking about the significance of silence in a conversation. The latter can refer to being silenced, to not being allowed to speak or use one's voice without severe consequences, or not being heard or acknowledged. But silence may also be deliberate, a decision not to engage or an act of resistance. Sein Fein, as a Republican political party in Northern Ireland, participates in the elections for Westminster but does not send elected officials to Westminster to speak, an act that communicates their ultimate identification with the Republic of Ireland rather than the UK. Remaining silent might thus be a deliberate and conscious act of defiance, but it may also be a consequence of force; imposed externally or as a product of 'internal' or even private acknowledged or unacknowledged dynamics related to historic trauma. As the above indicates, both aspects of silence are evidently also 'of' conversation, in that both invoke forms of communication. Emotionality, like idiom and style, are as much aspects of conversation as are words and modes of expression. All are in turn articulations of subjectivity, providing clues to the form that such articulation takes, and how this relates not only to the embodied subject but historical relations of power and domination.

IV. A relational ethos and method

What emerges from our discussion so far is a commitment to relationality as constitutive of the global, even when on the surface it appears to constitute separation. It further recognises the damage that has been done by the prevailing ontology of separation and with it, epistemological assumptions regarding universal truth, associated with a particular part of the world. What Shilliam (2015: 13) refers to as 'deep relations' would seek to repair colonial wounds and bind together people's lands and pasts, and not least the 'manifest and spiritual domains', which includes 'sophisticated practices of relating – and valuing relations – that are firmly embedded in particular locales and people yet at the same time proffer general principles of engagement, without laying claim to abstracted universals'. Such a commitment suggests an ethos of 'epistemological compassion' and a methodology that enables a turning of the epistemological gaze towards the creative potentiality of what we refer to as global conversations. The ethos that underpins our concept is best captured by Ling (2018) when she states that epistemological compassion 'embraces a "thousand" ways of knowing and being but still affirms our *world-of-worlds* as a totality'. However, this 'world-of-worlds', we suggest, is itself constitutive of global conversation and is reproduced and constituted in turn by such conversations as these occur in situated practices. There is here a triangle wherein each element is constitutively related not just to the other elements but to the whole; a relational ethos that recognises difference in the constitution of being, a methodology that turns the gaze to instances of global conversation and their generative potentiality, and a constitutive relational ontology/epistemology that both render global conversations possible and is constitutive of the totality that is our 'world-of-worlds'.

The three legs of the triangle are as follows: Global conversations require a *normative ethos* of 'deep relations' or 'epistemic compassion,' as suggested above. Conversations aren't won and lost but involve a more open-ended exchange that is receptive to difference and by which difference is continuously transformed, which links to the second leg, highlighting that conversations are *constitutive* of difference. Far from a static exchange between a priori identities, conversation shapes and reshapes difference and being along the way. In this respect, a shift from the focus on inter-relations to intra-relations is important. Finally, difference is constituted within relationships and belongs to a relational whole, which in this case is *global*. The three points are interlinked in so far as the normative is itself constitutive of practices from which different forms of global relationality then emerge.

There is a multiplicity of sites where conversations take place and the research agenda we are advocating would seek to uncover the extent to which such sites impact on the form that conversation takes, the terms of intelligibility, as well as expressions of emotion and embodiment. There is, for example, a difference between a conversation on social media as opposed to stealing a conversation in a UN corridor or sitting in a meeting room in Dubai or Paris. These in turn differ from the intellectual and pedagogical conversations that emerge from a comparative and dialogical approach to systems of knowledge. Having explored a number of obstacles to a global conversation, we want to focus on how it might be possible to move beyond these obstacles, to move from the emotional recognition of difference, for instance in responses to racism, to its excavation, for this is what would be required of 'deep relations'. What makes global conversations different than what cosmopolitan elites, and not least academics, already do, flying around the world to conferences and meetings in different local spaces? What are the implications for further research?

The first component of a research programme regards the construction of conversations around conceptual concerns at the heart of global politics from a range of disciplinary, geographical and cultural perspectives. In this respect, global conversations, as both a concept and a method, involves revisiting the universalising assumptions of international relations in order to begin to engage with conceptual systems that have emerged in other times and places. This has already been manifested in a workshop in Taiwan as part of the World International Studies Conference (2017),[16] which brought scholars from a range of different geographical, cultural and academic perspectives together to discuss the concept of global conversations, which was an important impetus for this article. A further example was published in a special issue of *Global Constitutionalism* (2017), which examined the meaning of 'independence' in an entangled world, against the backdrop of the Scottish Independence Referendum, but including perspectives from Catalonia, Kosovo, Colombia, and four struggles for independence within China. All of these claims to independence take place within a global legal infra-structure, but are informed by more historically and culturally specific assumptions and circumstances.[17] The central point of the conversation in this format is to begin a rethinking process that is more inclusive and is enriched by a multiplicity of historical experiences and knowledge systems, many of which have long been buried.

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[16] A further manifestation was a section in the context of the European International Studies Conference in Sicily in 2016, titled *Global Conversations*, which included a range of panels.

[17] This grew out of a workshop held at the University of St. Andrews, which included a much broader global and disciplinary representation.

A second crucial component of a research programme would involve the mapping of conversations that are manifest as intra-actions in a shared global space, to explore how intra-actions work ontologically in the construction of difference and the epistemological significance for how they are studied. The mapping might be more thematic, e.g. relating to conflict, violence, human security, climate change. An illustrative example points to the ongoing conversation between Indian and Swiss scientists, as well as local communities, on the problem of melting glaciers (in the Himalayas and the Alps).[18] The mapping would allow us to see how local knowledge and applications in Nepal, for instance, are mobilised in conversation with 'science' to alleviate a shared global problem. Further, a project led by Lily Ling (2018), before her tragic death, sought to explore the relationship between the historical Silk Road ethos, and the emerging local practices along this ancient route in the context of the Chinese 'One Belt, One Road Policy'.

The third component of our research programme, an 'ethnology' of global conversations, emerges from the mapping of assemblages of conversations, and reveals the embodied relationalities that are inter- and intra-subjective, and in relation to milieu that include places, architectures, and objects.[19] The mapping might involve sites of observation, from the impact of race and gender on patterns of valuation, speech, silencing, listening, interruption or destabilising interventions, in the space of meetings of different kinds, to how the spatial arrangement of private and public spaces impact on the expression of emotion, how people interact and converse with their environment, to the multi-perspectivity of different 'cuts' (e.g. Soviet Russia as the friend of India, or the enemy of the US), from the intra-state to the individual. These might bring insight into the global processes and patterns by which the international and local become interwoven.

These various approaches might reveal the power dynamics between speakers and hearers, the embodied and emotional dynamics, the corporeal manifestations of inclusion and exclusion, and the spatial and temporal aspects of conversation. In this respect, the object of excavation is both the subject of conversation and the means by which patterns of power that stand in the way of the latter might begin to be broken down. The retrieval of multiple knowledge systems, historically and their continuing impact on the present, might provide points of reflection on what we assume and who we are. The relationship between speech and bodily comportment is

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[18] See BBC World Service, 'Glaciers: Living on the Edge', The Compass, broadcast 22 April 2018.
[19] See Latour (1987) for his ethnologies of 'science in action' as a model of what we are advocating here.

constitutive of the form that conversation takes and the subtle exclusions manifest in the play of power; the direction of the gaze, the looking away or the turning of the back against an 'other'; actions often informed by discriminations relating to gender and race. Form is also expressed through the rules of language use, assumptions about what constitutes a 'universal' language, how its rules relate to the particularities of distinct languages, their idioms and styles.

The arts, including film, literature, photography, and the fine arts are also locations of global conversation. All genres of aesthetic practice evoke the inter-textuality that bears witness to the production of something new that emerges from systems of knowledge, reference points, and forms of expression mobilised in particular work. Global conversations are at once textual and visual and many worlds can be brought into the one, revealing both tensions and potentialities. An example might be the work of the Palestinian artist, Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance*, where the themes of exile, the body, subjectivity, language (English and Arabic) and gender are all present in the plural conversations taking place in this video installation (Jabri: 1999). Alternatively, the Uganda novelist, Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) brings worlds into conversation, tracing the experience of two African sisters, one sold into slavery and the other married off to a slave trader, and the reverberation of this separation across generations.

A further component regards the implications of a shift from an individualist to a relational ontology for understanding strategies that might contribute to the transformation of power hierarchies that limit conversation. From this perspective, greater consciousness of the past, and prior framings of who can and cannot speak, provides the point of departure for listening and learning how to engage in new ways. One important historical example is that of non-violent strategy, which has been closely bound up in practices of resistance. Gandhi's *Satyagraha*, which rests on a relational ontology (Chacko 2016), assumes that non-violent strategy has the potential to transform rather than destroy relationships between self and other, placing them on a more equal playing field. Speaking from a position that recognises one's dignity as a sentient being is itself an act of non-violent resistance, at least in a context where this possibility has been denied, and as such is likely to invite an aggressive or violent reaction. But the hope, whether looking at Gandhi or any number of other examples across the globe, is to create the conditions for a conversation to replace a monologue of hierarchical violence, which often holds the boundaries of difference in place. Violence is an intra-action that seals a boundary of hate and separation, and thus reinforces an individual ontology which becomes self-reproducing.

From this perspective, starting a conversation can be a non-violent assertion of identity within difference that is also an act of resistance which

transforms the boundaries of self and other. The context of conversation highlights non-violence as a communicative strategy that deliberately brings difference into a confrontation with power, to the end of exposing the structural violence that confines the space for speaking freely (Steger 2006) and bringing contrasting ontologies into conversation. At the intra-state level, one can see the juxtaposition of individualist and relational ontologies in former colonial states that have been socialised into the Westphalian tradition of diplomacy, while also being informed by ancient traditions that are more indigenous, as noted by Datta-Ray (2015) in his analysis of the influence of the *Mahabharata* (and Gandhi) on contemporary Indian foreign policy, or of the Confucian tradition of *Tianxia* ('all under heaven') on Chinese policy (Wang 2017) or Daoism on Chinese military strategy (Sawyer 2008); or the impact of Ubuntu on, among others, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Norval 1998; Mkhwanazi 2017).

Ubuntu suggests the potential that we become more human in recognising the humanity of others, which, as Ngcoya (2015) notes, provides a point of departure for a more emancipatory cosmopolitanism. While conventional cosmopolitan conceptions of IR have a hard time engaging with world views and conceptions of indigenous peoples, the latter come into focus, he argues, with a more emancipatory cosmopolitism 'from below', which rebalances by accounting for the diversity of social and cultural forces in a globalising world. While this ontological conversation suggests yet another either/or choice, it highlights a different approach to difference which pushes beyond post-structuralist debates on the topic. While sharing a family resemblance in destabilising the identity/difference relationship as hierarchy, a conversation with, for instance, a Daoist understanding of difference might bring the further insight that opposites, like yin and yang, are always mutually implicated. LHM Ling (2013b) applies a Daoist approach to identity and difference to an examination of the relationship between the US and China. The China threat thesis presents China in mutually exclusive terms, as a potential regional or global hegemon that seeks to replace the US in this role. Ling argues instead that it is important to see u.s. in China and china in U.S. By this she means an attentiveness to the multitude of different ways in which the being and history of opposites intersect rather than being necessarily at odds and mutually exclusive.[20]

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[20] E.g., while Western technological and military superiority was dependent on discoveries from the East, China's modernisation has relied on ideas and technologies from the West. The US had a presence in China during the 'Century of Humiliation' but also contains large numbers of Chinese immigrants. In both populations there are scholars searching for a new way to organise global politics.

V. Conclusions

A multi-perspectival conversation suggests that one engages with an Other from a position in social and global space, where one's perspective is shaped by their positionality. This differs from either dialogue, which seeks universal agreement, or negotiation that seeks to divide up the pie, or an argument that is won or lost. The often-heard charge of relativism rests on the assumption of a singular truth, and thus a competition and hierarchy between different perspectives. A conversation by definition assumes instead that participants, precisely because they are different add something unique and that both may, through the process, be transformed. The emphasis is on process rather than outcomes, and on respect for difference rather than shared rules of agreement and consensus. A conversation is ongoing and continuously shifts and changes as the participants learn and become qualitatively different as their relationality is transformed through the process.

Both the view that other traditions have nothing to offer that hasn't been captured by Western scholars, [21] or that this potential opens up a relativist can of worms – which, it might further be said, detracts from real science – have the effect of silencing others before we have even bothered to listen or engage with them. In this respect, the resistance of those who claw their way out of centuries of sedimented silence, needs to be met by a serious reflexivity on the part of Western scholars regarding a sense of entitlement, given their positionality in the 'West'. Much as Wendt (2015) has argued that a shift from a Newtonian to a Quantum framework potentially opens up spaces for dealing with seemingly intractable problems, engagement with non-Western traditions potentially provides a more human face to what this alternative angle might look like. A conversation can start anywhere. An important realisation along the way is that difference is neither fixed in space, nor by essence hierarchical. Here the Daoist tradition, or that of quantum physics,[22] has something to contribute, in so far as both conceive of difference as mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive. This can be seen alternatively in the particle that becomes a wave or a wave a particle, or in the Daoist symbol by which yin is contained in yang and yang in yin (Wang 2012). A conversation creates the potential to see the self in the other as well as the other in the self.

[21] Hung Jen Wang (2013) notes examples of Western experts on China, who have said to Chinese theorists that Western theories can already account for the concerns they raise.
[22] This is a reference to Niels Bohr's concept of complementarity which he identifies as sharing a family resemblance with the Daoist yin and yang, as notable from his incorporation of the Daoist symbol in his family coat of arms (see Fierke 2019).

The point in the context of this argument – and the conversation itself – is to begin to rethink how contemporary divisions in global space, and indeed the fragmentation of global space, have placed constraints on who we are, who we talk to, where we fight, who is out, and who is in, but to also highlight that none of this is fixed or certain although much of it is in need of healing or justice. The very same modern warfare that has historically wiped out indigenous populations, from the Samurai to Native Americans, to the scramble for Africa and the fragmentation of the Middle East, continues now to produce more death, of the populations targeted and some of those involved in interventionist warfare. The disproportionality of numbers affected may silence, but it may at the same time provoke conversation, an intra-action of and with those affected.

We have suggested global conversations as both concept and method. Conceptually, the relational understanding we provide takes us well beyond universalising and formal assumptions that persist in perspectives that focus on 'dialogue'. Spivak's prioritising of 'idiom', as highlighted earlier, provokes a conceptualisation of global conversations that is always relational and in process. A method of global conversations must also be premised on what we refer to as a relational epistemology, so that, for example, a research programme based on the mapping of global conversations is enabled by Ndlovu-Gatsheni's 'epistemic freedom' or Ling's 'thousand' ways of knowing. Both concept and method are premised on a relational ontology of the global, which we suggest, has profound implications for how we think of the constitution of the global as always in process. This process may frequently construct deep divisions of separation and violence, as in the 'clash of civilisations', but, far from suggesting that individual ontology is intrinsic, only reinforces the point that relationality takes different forms, negative as well as positive. The point of conversation is to introduce the possibility of agency, both in thinking differently about difference and engaging with 'others', thereby reshaping a different kind of global space that rests on the dignity of all life, human and otherwise.

Acknowledgements

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