

Hidden in plain sight*: Coloniality, Capitalism and Race/ism as far as the eye can see.

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 175 pp., £)

Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 226pp., £.).

Robbie Shilliam and Lisa Tilley (eds.), ‘Special Issue: Raced Markets’, *New Political Economy* (2018 (23):5, pp.531-639, £).

Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 265 pp., £).

Aaron Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality. Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019, 264 pp., £).

Abstract

This review essay is a generative reading of four monographs and one special issue to rethink the discipline of IR and its syllabus anticolonially. At the centre of *White Innocence* by Gloria Wekker, *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being*, by Christina Sharpe, *The Colonial Lives of Property* by Brenna Bhandar, *Beyond Coloniality* by Aaron Kamugisha and the New Political Economy special issue titled *Raced Markets* edited by Robbie Shilliam and Lisa Tilley are issues of race and racism, neoliberalism and capital and (the afterlives of) colonisation and slavery. This essay deploys a narrative approach of the autobiographical example to write the themes and arguments of the works onto the international everyday, i.e. a period of five months (April-September 2019) and the five places (Toronto, Stellenbosch, (New) England, Ghana and Puerto Rico) in which these works were read. Firstly, the themes of racism, capitalism and coloniality – to varying degrees disavowed and erased in both IR as a discipline and public opinion – appear as persistent, pervasive yet adapting across time, space and situatedness. Secondly, both the autobiographical examples and the works point at the equally omnipresent cracks in the system and invite reflection on anticolonial alternatives (of solidarity). In conclusion, the essay explores how these works could inform reconceptualisation of the IR syllabus, towards a discipline that engages with the world rather than itself, against the colonial status quo.

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4 **Key words:** Racism, coloniality, neoliberalism, narrative, IR
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This review essay is a generative reading of four monographs and one special issue to rethink the discipline of IR and its syllabus anticolonially. At the centre of *White Innocence* by Gloria Wekker, *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being*, by Christina Sharpe, *The Colonial Lives of Property* by Brenna Bhandar, *Beyond Coloniality* by Aaron Kamugisha and the New Political Economy special issue titled *Raced Markets* edited by Robbie Shilliam and Lisa Tilley are issues of race and racism¹, neoliberalism and capital and coloniality² and (the afterlives of) colonisation and slavery.

¹ In contrast to the neoliberal tendency to reduce racism to a set of prejudices against racialised people *by individuals* ('curable' through raising awareness, naming and shaming and re-education) in this context, racism is understood as fundamentally structural. It is a hierarchisation of racialised peoples, through processes of dehumanisation (cf. Aimé Césaire's *thingification*), structurally entrenched in the distribution of power and organisation of society, resulting in said racialised peoples' premature death, subjection to systematic violences and exclusions from society. Racism today is not an abstract concept but grounded in a concrete history spanning five centuries of colonialism, chattel slavery and the rise of capitalism. From a Western positionality, anti-Black racism, Whiteness and White supremacy can be read as the most generative yet most disavowed manifestations of present-day racism. See e.g. Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London: Zed Books 2011); Ibram X Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Random House, 2017); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955); Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, 'More than Prejudice: Restatement, Reflections, and New Directions in Critical Race Theory', *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no.1 (2015): 73–87; Kimberlè Crenshaw, 'Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward', *Connecticut Law Review* 43, no.5 (2011):1253–1354.

² Coloniality, in this context, is understood as going beyond the historic events and advent of colonialism, i.e. the actual dispossession and formal annexation and governing of others' land from 1492 onwards. It can be read as a matrix of power (of which racism is a constitutive one) resulting in, allowing for and sustaining a triple system of violences and destruction: (1) *genocide* as in the physical killing, destruction and disposability of certain peoples – through processes including: (indifference in the face of mass) killings or death, dehumanisation, thingification and racism, incarceration, ...; (2) *epistemicide* as in the destruction of certain (peoples') knowledges and ways of knowing through processes including: zero-sum, linear colonial knowledge production, mythology, silencing and erasure, amnesia and innocence; (3) *ecocide* as in the destruction of life environments and ecosystems, through processes including forceful dispossession, theft of (access to) land, enclosure, land grabbing, (extractive) industries, depletion of natural resources, over-cultivation, see e.g. Gurminder Bhambra, *Connected Sociologies* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,' *Cultural Studies* 21 no. 2-3 (2007): 240-70; Rolando Vázquez, 'Translation as Erasure: Thoughts on Modernity's Epistemic Violence,' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24 no.1 (2011): 27-44; Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being / Power / Truth / Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument,' *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 no.3 (2003): 257-337; María Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism,' *Hypatia* 25 no.4 (2010): 742-759; Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Ramòn Grosfoguel, and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodriguez, eds., *The Modern/Colonial/ Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century: Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002); Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Coloniality of Power in Development Studies and the Impact of Global Imperial Designs on Africa', *Australasian Review of African Studies* 33 no. 2 (2012): 48–73; Meera Sabaratnam, 'IR in Dialogue... But Can We Change the Subjects? A Typology of Decolonising Strategies for the Study of World Politics', *Millennium* 39 no.3 (2011): 781-803

These themes are anything but cheerful yet, engaging with these works brought me joy. It is a joy on the ruins of epistemicide, from seeing the unequivocal, life affirming recognition on every page of these works, of the systematic erasure and violation of IR's silenced peoples. It is a joy built on the understanding that the systemic naturalisation of capitalism and disavowal of race and coloniality kills people; a people's systematically denied and erased suffering allows for the re-enactment of their premature death in the material world and in the present.

In *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker marries intersectionality with postcolonialism and takes the conversation about coloniality and racism, patriarchy and heteronormativity to the Netherlands, the metropole and its colonies *as one analytical space*. The book hits close to home for me as I hail from next-doors Dutch-speaking Flanders in Belgium; just like Wekker (Suriname) I have roots in the colonies (Rwanda). Reading *White Innocence* is like scrolling through my own treasure chest of anecdotes of structural and everyday racism and racialisation, legitimised by colonial amnesia and disavowal. Given the Netherlands – mostly self-declared – reputation of being a beacon of progressiveness in continental Europe, the book is especially powerful in engaging with coloniality and racism there where it is most vehemently disavowed, as well as outside the Anglosphere.

Aaron Kamugisha's *Beyond Coloniality, Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition* is an erudite love letter to Caribbean knowing, life and survival. In his unabashed admiration for the authors and texts he shares his close reading of was refreshing. His work, meticulously discussing and centring Caribbean powerhouses of thought like C.L.R. James and Sylvia Wynter, pushes us to think of how we can unearth these silenced knowings, while making sure we go beyond merely talking back. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being* is a soul piercing and analytically innovative work of art that helps us along with that. Through a poetic, both authoritative and vulnerable language, she centres and honours Black diasporic experiences, life and survival from the Americas to the Mediterranean. By organising her book around the concepts of 'The Wake, The Ship, The Hold and The Weather', she offers a methodology for centring the afterlives of slavery in our study of the social world.

Brenna Bhandar's *Colonial Lives of Property. Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* is a discipline bending tour the force. She marries social, legal and historical scholarship for a grounded theorisation of the colonial. From Palestine to the enclosures in the British Isles or dispossessed/unceded lands in the Americas and Australia, the book brings home the deeply materialist nature of the colonial violence embedded in our capitalist system and how it defines and enacts property and propriety, i.e. being (civilised) and thus human.

Bhandar's work joins the special issue of *New Political Economy* edited by Lisa Tilley and Robbie Shilliam in offering some powerful contributions to those time-consuming is-it-class-or-race? debates³. The authors are gathered around the editors' generative concept of *Raced Markets* to

³ See e.g. Charles Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism And Black Radicalism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); David R. Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism*. (New York: Verso, 2019); Tahir Wood, 'Class Exists but Can We Say the Same of Race?', *Mail & Guardian*, 10 August 2018. Available at:

think through the co-constitutive nature of race, racism, capitalism and neoliberalism. The breadth of issues and places addressed in the special issue is inspiring. Some articles speak to the analytical erasure and disavowal of race and the colonial, cf. in a) the figure of Robinson Crusoe and how he informs textbook economic orthodoxy (Watson) or b) the failing solidarity of the welfare state (Bhambra and Holmwood). Others seek to re-centre race to understand some key-features of our neo-liberal present differently, like in c) clinical trials and bio-economy (Merz and Williams), d) refugees and migrants as surplus population in Budapest (Rajaram), e) Detroit's Municipal Bankruptcy (Phinney) or f) neoliberalism and far right imaginaries in the UK and the US (Saul).

The aim of this review is to engage anti-coloniality, not just as a research topic but as an ethos as well. This essay therefore offers a generative rather than an evaluative reading of these multidisciplinary works as a way to practice knowledge cultivation instead of knowledge production.⁴ The former is characterised by a certain open-ended, non-zero-sum, non-competitive logic of oxygenation from which other insights can grow or resurface. *It is in this spirit that the title of this essay gestures to a ground-breaking article by Errol Henderson titled 'Hidden in Plain Sight. Racism and International Relations Theory'⁵, to carry these insights back to the social reality of the international 'out there'. To do this, the essay deploys a narrative approach⁶ to what Saidiya Hartman calls the 'autobiographical example'.⁷ Unlike autobiographical or auto-ethnographical approaches, the aim is not to centre the author's experiences as the object of study to research the international differently. Here, the narrative approach of the autobiographical example is merely used as a technique or lens, to write the themes and arguments of the works onto the international everyday, i.e. a period of five months (April-September 2019) and the five places (Toronto, Stellenbosch, (New) England, Ghana and Puerto Rico) in which these works were read. With this approach, the essay also recognises the political and epistemic importance of rendering the themes at hand tangible, to, again in Hartman's words: 'tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction.'⁸

The result of this non-linear, unfinished engagement with these works is that, firstly, the themes of racism, capitalism and coloniality – to varying degrees disavowed and erased in both IR as a discipline and public opinion – appear as persistent, pervasive yet adapting across time, space and situatedness. Secondly, both the autobiographical examples and the works point at the equally

<https://mg.co.za/article/2018-08-10-00-class-exists-but-can-we-say-the-same-of-race> Last accessed October 26, 2019.

⁴ Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 24-25.

⁵ Errol A. Henderson, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26 no.1 (2013): 71-92; I am also inspired by Himadeep Muppidi, *The Colonial Signs of International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁶ In IR and Politics see e.g. Naeem Inayatullah and Elizabeth Dauphinee, *Narrative Global Politics: Theory, History and The Personal in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016) and Naeem Inayatullah ed., *Autobiographical International Relations: I, IR* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁷ cited in Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 8

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

omnipresent cracks in the system and invite reflection on anticolonial alternatives (of solidarity). The feeling that there seems no outside to the colonial is at times overwhelming. Bhandar usefully turns to Stuart Hall's idea of the noninevitability and contingent, yet 'nonarbitrary character of the articulation of race and class [as this] reveals the potential for political transformation and rupture.'⁹ She brings in Cedric Robinson to remind us that racial regimes are unstable truth systems, which implies that it is not sufficient to show how race is a fabrication, but that we also need the detailed study of how it operates in practice, as it is from there that we can be reminded of the noninevitability and contingency.

Ultimately, the most generative and challenging way of engaging with these works is to not confuse this pervasiveness with omnipresence-with-no-outside. In this vein, in conclusion, the essay summarises how these works could inform reconceptualisation of the IR syllabus, towards a discipline that engages with the world rather than itself, against the colonial status quo.

Toronto, Turtle Bay, last days of March 2019.

The International Studies Association (ISA) celebrates its sixty years. We – delegates and panel chairs in particular – are encouraged for the first time to acknowledge that our yearly Convention (invariably somewhere in North America) is taking place on stolen settler colonial land.¹⁰

I am apprehensive to mispronounce the name of Nations whose land we are on. I am conscious that I have not taken the time to properly educated myself. So, I omit to open my panel with the land acknowledgement. It gives me pause; about my commitment and willingness to discomfort, about how much I need to learn still.

All the panels I am on deal with on coloniality or race though, so in the end, there is always someone acknowledging the people and its land; recognising the nature of our 'presence' in both past and present. So, I listen and participate in the conversations that need to be had about settler and non-settler colonialism.¹¹ But mostly I learn. Because, in the European 'metropole' the issues of land (dispossession, acknowledgements, settling, ...) are even for someone like me, whose outlook, birth and upbringing in Europe are a direct consequence of colonialism, invariably pushed to the background; outsourced overseas.

⁹ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 14.

¹⁰ 'The Committee [on the Status of Representation and Diversity] asks all panel chairs and event conveners to please read this statement aloud at the beginning of each session: To begin, we wish to acknowledge this land on which the ISA conference is taking place. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.' Available at: <https://www.isanet.org/News/ID/5692/ISA-2019-Land-Acknowledgement> Last accessed September 3, 2019.

¹¹ The article by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 no.1 (2012) has been very important for me in this regard. George Sefa Dei, *Reframing Blackness and Black Solidarities Through Anti-colonial and Decolonial Prisms* (New York: Springer, 2017) brings them in conversation with issues of Blackness in North America.

1 Reading Wekker, Kamugisha, Bhandar, Sharpe and Tilley and Shilliam et al. together, helps me
2 to think all forms of colonialism co-constitutively without conflating the variations in time, place
3 and characteristics, including the learned division between settler/non-settler colonialism.

4 Bhandar's, for instance, is a study of both property and propriety. She shows that land and property
5 are useful entry points into both material and immaterial coloniality everywhere and in the *longue*
6 *durée*. 'If the possession of land was (and remains) the ultimate objective of colonial power, then
7 property law is the primary means of realizing this desire'¹², Bhandar writes. 'The dispossession
8 of indigenous peoples of their land was justified through the absence of legible property legislation,
9 casting them as uncivilised, and outside of history, a people on which to enact programmes of
10 civilisation. As such it is bound to the concept of the human, and thus the civilised.'¹³ The way she
11 complicates that story of the material and immaterial is a generative one for thinking both settler
12 and non-settler colonialism and the manifold techniques of the status quo. Her examination of the
13 2014 Canadian Supreme Court case *Tsilhqot'in v. British Columbia* stretches our imagination to
14 think land, dispossession and racialisation together and across time into the present. The judgement
15 makes space for indigenous conceptions of land use and ownership and can thus be seen as a
16 politically and legally an important move. Yet Bhandar points to the fact that: 'it remains tethered
17 to a racial, anthropological schema in its conceptualization of the claimants' mode of land use and
18 ownership as seminomadic.'¹⁴

19 I take from this that re-centring issues of land and acknowledgements, of theft and dispossession,
20 are but a minimal condition and first step against amnesia and erasure, towards *de-thingification*
21 and *de-naturalisation* of coloniality. But these performative practices do not automatically address
22 the material and structural advent and perpetuation of settler colonialism. The micro-instances of
23 discomfort, guilt and virtue in these rituals for non-indigenous peoples are easily mistaken for
24 being sufficient rather than minimal conditions for decolonisation.

25 The works, each in their own way, speak to how neo-liberalism manages to have everything remain
26 the same and how it co-opts and commodifies decolonisation efforts. One of the articles in the
27 *Raced Markets* special issue, both illustrates and complicates the dangers of inclusion and diversity
28 discourses by zooming in on bio-medics. Merz and Williams examine stem-cell research in the
29 UK and clinical drug trials in the US to engage with bio ethics, racialisation and how biological
30 and social racial assumptions relate to responsibility. They offer an important cautionary tale on
31 the politics of inclusion and diversity. The authors complicate the issue of exploitation and
32 commodification of racialised bodies by suggesting that it is not straightforwardly readable as only
33 that. If we were to simply argue against it, we would miss other registers and imaginaries as well
34 as the potential life-saving benefits from including racialised peoples in biomedical research and
35 trials. At the same time, they caution that 'it is necessary, in the contemporary political moment,

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¹² Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

Stellenbosch, South Africa, early days of April 2019.

A few days after the ISA Convention in Toronto, I head to South Africa, where researchers and stakeholders from Africa and Europe are gathered for a speculative workshop on the future of Africa-European Union (EU) relations. I realise that I find it difficult to speculate on the future of those relations as a set of descriptive scenarios. The material, deeply colour-coded violent nature of the context in which this exercise takes place is even more disconcerting than having to fantasise about a future whose violent present and past is disavowed or forgotten. We are housed in a luscious wine estate in Stellenbosch, courtesy of European Commission funding. When I hear Flemish from some of the families vacationing on the estate, I remember that back home in Belgium it is Easter break. My presence turns into a concomitant experience of hypervisibility (as one of the only non-white guests tended to by exclusively non-white members of staff) and utter invisibility (as clearly none of the white Flemish guests is expecting me to be culturally closest to them). Meanwhile, next doors to our workshop, the estate's conference centre houses a meeting of a white Afrikaners organisation. While I am pretty used to the White¹⁶ gaze on my brown skin, I can feel that these looks are of a qualitatively different nature. It is like feeling time on my skin, their gaze communicating that the script of what is politically correct (and who gets to write that script) has only very recently been flipped. I think of Gloria Wekker's White Innocence and how her stories resonate with my experiences in Flanders.

Wekker offers a set of anecdotes – from her childhood in the 50s, to the 80s, when she was a young professional and early academic, to today – to paint the picture of both the everyday and institutionalised nature of racism and colonial amnesia in Dutch society. What appears are the tropes of racism and sexism very similar to anti-black racism and sexism elsewhere, anywhere really: the black woman as a prostitute, the hypersexualised black man, both readily underestimated or criminalised. Through the prism of innocence, she is able to zoom in on the profound disavowal of these phenomena in Dutch society. ‘Innocence (...) thickly describes part of a dominant Dutch way of being in the world’, Wekker states. ‘The claim of innocence, however, is a double edged sword: it contains not-knowing, but also not wanting to know, capturing what philosopher Charles W. Mills has described as the epistemology of ignorance.’¹⁷ Her work is

¹⁵ Sibille Merz & Ros Williams, ‘We All Have a Responsibility to Each Other’: Valuing Racialised Bodies in the Neoliberal Bioeconomy’, *New Political Economy* 23 no.5 (2018): 560-573, 571.

¹⁶ Building on Clive Gabay, *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) I deploy the capital W when I gesture to a phenomenon that surpasses phenotype to include the ideology of Whiteness and the historically grounded hierarchical categorisation of peoples with people considered ‘white’ on top.

¹⁷ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 17.

concerned with how that innocence is accomplished and maintained and therefore turns to the analytical framework of the *cultural archive*:

*'located in many things, in the way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined. Most important, it is between our ears and in our hearts and souls. (...) its content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common-sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule.'*¹⁸

As there is a generation between Wekker and myself, I wonder about the possibility (and speed) of change, and if at all, in which direction(s). What is the meaning of the different ways in which racism manifests itself? Wekker's and my own experience of everyday racism in the Lowlands is much more explicit than in the UK for instance, where even the disavowal of racism sounds more polite (!). Yet, having lived in the UK for six years now, I have no doubt that the essence of the racism is the same. This raises the question of the significance, if at all, of the extent to which the racism is overt. As a highly educated professional with a permanent contract, I know I prefer the British covert, I-am-too-polite-to-stare-at-you version of racism over the I-do-not-believe-in-political-correctness Flemish one. But I think I would rather be poor or unemployed or ill in Belgium. I think.

Reflecting on this in South Africa, complicates this picture even further. I wonder how *White Innocence* and its focus on the *cultural archive* would help us make sense of post-Apartheid racial violence, #Rhodes/FeesMustFall demands for a different (some charge 'nativist'¹⁹) *cultural archive* and intra-African xenophobia.

It is useful, necessary even, to bring in analyses of neoliberalism and political economy here and how they relate to racism and Whiteness. The *Raced Markets* special issue does this well, convincingly and invitingly. Saull, in his article titled 'Racism and Far Right Imaginaries Within Neo-liberal Political Economy' focuses on how neoliberalism in the UK and the US needs racist and extreme right ideologies. 'Societies and states may be neo-liberal (...) but the individuals within them rarely identify as such', he writes. 'Hence, the politics of neo-liberalism has tended to be associated or combined with other political currents as the means through which neo-liberalism has managed to govern. (...) And, in this respect, with far-right imaginaries as sources of solidarity (i.e. moral economy) and political belonging have played an important role as an ideological compensation for the radically individualist political ontology of neo-liberalism.'²⁰

I wonder how this analysis would both enrich and benefit from a detailed engagement with African electoral politics and political economies or other systems beyond the West. Sharpe's and Kamugisha's epistemic centring of the Black diaspora/Caribbean experience already gives us a

¹⁸ Wekker, *White Innocence*, 19.

¹⁹ For a discussion see e.g. Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, '“Rhodes Must Fall”: South African Universities as a Site of Struggle', *Tabula Rasa* 25 (2016): 195-224.

²⁰ Richard Saull, 'Racism And Far Right Imaginaries Within Neo-Liberal Political Economy', *New Political Economy* 23 no.5 (2018): 588-608, 594.

sense of the generative power of decentring the white-Western experience, yet it does not necessarily centre places beyond the West as spaces from which to know the world.²¹ I read them as an invitation to do so. Kamugisha's engagement with citizenship invites us to think outside the official box of the nation-state – (South-) African engagements with Ubuntu and pan-Africanism go in the same direction – and Sharpe invites us to start from the idea and reality of Black no-citizens being in the wake to think the world anew. She writes: 'For, if we are lucky, we live in the knowledge that the wake has positioned us as no-citizens. If we are lucky the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world.'²² I suspect that this is not an automatic process but rather one that needs a deliberate alignment with that positionality and the politics that come with it.

Thinking back on my land acknowledgement unease in Turtle Bay, with every sip of wine in that Stellenbosch estate I am reminded that however much the White Afrikaner or Flemish gaze are part of a system of violence against people and bodies like mine, it does not mean that I am not also a material beneficiary, participant, perpetrator of that system. During my morning runs in the picture-perfect vineyard with majestic table mountains in the background, I see and feel that, also here, I am dwelling on stolen land. How can we go beyond merely acknowledging this reality? How can it inform our scholarship differently? Is this kind of complicity, co-optation and alienation part of the answer to the question of the (im)possibility of radical change?

(New) England, mid-April to early June 2019

I return to the US and travel up from NYC to Hartford, Connecticut, to give a guest lecture at Trinity College. All I can see, from place names to the university's architecture, are traces of my current country of residence, the England on the other side of the Atlantic. I follow my journey on the map: Bristol, Greenwich, Glastonbury, Manchester, Norwich, New Britain and New London,

.... North of Boston I even see Portsmouth, the same place name of my city in the UK.

I think about *tabula rasa* and *terra nullius*, principles at the heart of any colonial undertaking that are in one way or the other, invoked in all five of the works. They refer to labour of (im)material erasure, of violently projecting lands and peoples as empty, blank slates, not- or under-used, there for the taking and the filling, copy/paste-wise. In Dutch the word blank is used to describe (the skin-color of) white people, it has a pristine and innocent connotation...²³ As I engage with these works together, I see more clearly the tremendous power of White world sustained amnesia and erasure. It seems like only yesterday when I looked at the American copy/pasted place names as mildly amusing oddities. To embrace an anti-colonial ethos, our study of the international would need to do that: denaturalise the colonial erasures and amnesia in our everyday, like seemingly

²¹ Sabelo Ndlovu Gatsheni speaks of the need to not only provincialise Europe but also deprovincialize Africa in e.g. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Against Bringing Africa "Back-In"', in *Recentring Africa in International Relations*, eds. Marta Iñiguez de Heredia, and Zubairu Wai, *Beyond Lack, Peripherality, and Failure*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 283-305.

²² Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 22.

²³ Anti-racist activists are consciously avoiding the word now, using the word *wit* or *witte*, instead, as, like in English, it refers to the colour.

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2 *I am back home in Portsmouth, 'old' England, UK. I hear a news report²⁴ on radio about a White*
3 *supremacist protest march in Portland, USA. One of the protesters is asked about what he is*
4 *marching for. He explains that he is tired of people saying that white men are privileged, while it*
5 *is clear that their privileges are being taken away. 'Why would you deserve to be privileged at*
6 *all?' the reporter asks. 'Because we built this country!' is his instant, utterly indignant response.*
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10 *After my trip in those settler colonies while reading these works, I cannot un-see the signs*
11 *of coloniality everywhere. Portsmouth, UK, is the home of the British Navy and its many*
12 *warships; traces of the colonial and slave trade past, like the seafront neighbourhood 'Spice*
13 *Island', are now, more than ever, hidden in plain sight.*

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15 *The perversity and pervasiveness of disavowed coloniality and White supremacy come together*
16 *most forcefully on June 5th when Donald Trump and his colleagues from other (settler) colonising*
17 *nations descend on Portsmouth to commemorate D-Day@70. Even without Trump there, the way*
18 *the UK (and not only) yearly commemorates the World Wars is a whitewashed mythological tale*
19 *of singlehanded victory over 'exceptional' European evil.²⁵*

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22 *Our political landscape today is shared between overt fascists and seemingly less-offensive*
23 *leaders. Both kinds stand for murderous indifference or laws that kill people in the Mediterranean*
24 *or see them locked up along the US-Mexico border. The ease²⁶ with which Trump's presence is*
25 *felt as more normal than not inviting him, even to those who oppose his crude and crass policies*
26 *and political style, illustrates the profound effects of colonial amnesia and erasure. It normalises*
27 *the inclusion of leaders with fascist ideas and practices to even to commemorate the defeat of*
28 *fascism and Nazism. It is the same force that perpetuates these ideologies and practices by*
29 *different names. Yet, they are literally there, hidden in plain sight, for all of us to see.*
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34 How do we truly see, though? Sharpe writes that '[t]he ongoing crisis of capital in the form of
35 migrants fleeing lives made unlivable is becoming more and more visible, or perhaps, less and
36 less able to be ignored.'²⁷ I wonder if this is the case. I rather see a world in which the
37 information is available and ever more readily accessible; it does not seem to radically change
38 the length or depth
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47 ²⁴ See e.g. BBC, 'Portland Rally: Far-Right and Antifa Groups Face Off', 18 August 2019 Available at:
48 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-49382386> Last accessed October 26, 2019.

49 ²⁵ Pankaj Mishra, 'How Colonial Violence Came Home: The Ugly Truth of the First World War', *The Guardian*, 10
50 November 2017, Available at [https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/10/how-colonial-violence-came-home-](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/10/how-colonial-violence-came-home-theugly-truth-of-the-first-world-war)
51 [theugly-truth-of-the-first-world-war](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/10/how-colonial-violence-came-home-theugly-truth-of-the-first-world-war) Last accessed October 26 2019.

52 ²⁶ In an op-ed in the Guardian, London Mayor Sadiq Khan is vocal about his opposition to rolling out the red carpet
53 for Donald Trump. His critical intervention is rendered profoundly ahistorical by calling it un-British. Sadiq Khan,
54 'It's un-British to roll out the red carpet for Donald Trump', *The Guardian*, 1 June 2019. Available at:
55 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jun/01/donald-trump-state-visit-red-carpet-unbritish> Last accessed
56 September 6, 2019.

57 ²⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 59.

of our solidarity-attention-span, nor which people we continue to not care about. I think of the image of baby Alan Kurdi in 2015, washed up on a Mediterranean beach, and the state of our asylum and refugees and migration policies today. I think of how national borders, despite their literal murderous nature, are not fundamentally questioned, in everyday discourse or policy making, or continue to be the organising principle in mainstream of the discipline of Political Sciences and IR.

Turning to a material analysis of political economy, as proposed by *Raced Markets*, allows for a deeper, more grounded understanding. In the last article of the special issue, Rajaram engages in his piece 'Refugees as Surplus Population: Race Migration and Capitalist Value Regimes' with migrants and refugees as capitalism's rest category. 'Like native labourers in the colonies, undocumented migrants working in European industry sustain the system of value that justifies capitalist systems and their ideologies, while being unable to possess or lay claim to this system of value as other labourers can (even if these other labourers do end up participating in what is often a consumerist ideology that justifies their relative dispossession). The informal work of undocumented migrants also serves capitalism's central purpose, much more so than formal labour with their wage claims and benefits: the extraction of maximum value from labour to the point of disposability.'²⁸ Similarly to Sharpe's Black non-citizens, Rajaram points to the fact that focusing on migrants and refugees as this residual, disposable group produced and necessary in a context of capitalism could be a place from which to think solidarity anew. A such it is presented as a politics to counter the divide and conquer feature that is also ever present in the politics of coloniality. 'Such solidarity is framed around the refusal of a divisive politics of race that seeks to establish animosity between classes similarly positioned before capitalist systems of production.'²⁹

Accra, Ghana, early days of August 2019.

For the first time in 60 years, the ISA holds a conference on the African continent.

Let that sink in for a moment³⁰.

We know that this is not just a technical, logistical oversight or omission. It is one of the many symptoms of the pathology of Whiteness and Eurocentrism at the heart of our discipline³¹. What appears as an issue of geography, is a deeply held yet disavowed conviction that certain places, peoples and their knowledges, cannot or do not need to host or hold our study of the international. It befalls most explicitly the African continent, and peoples of African descent. Ultimately, at the

²⁸ Prem Kumar Rajaram, 'Refugees as Surplus Population: Race, Migration and Capitalist Value Regimes', *New Political Economy* 23 no. 5 (2018): 627-639, 636.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 636.

³⁰ I am not expressing surprise here, merely an invitation to genuinely denaturalise this state of affairs.

³¹ Meera Sabaratnam, 'Avatars of Eurocentrism in the Critique of the Liberal Peace', *Security Dialogue*, 44 no.3 (2011): 259-278; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth Of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

*exclusion of the majority of this planet, it is the White male experience in a handful of countries in the West that has shaped not just what, but also how and why we learn the world.*³²

I am happy about this long overdue advent of an ISA conference in Africa. However, it also takes me back to the minimal vs. sufficient conditions for transformation in the discourses of inclusion and diversity. Merely including more places where we study the world will not automatically shift the tools, lenses and rationales from which we study. It is what we see happening in the initiatives to pluralise or internationalise IR, resulting in even more places and actors co-opted in the production of colonial knowledges. We need to investigate how being in these different places, centring the experiences of the peoples concerned as a place from which to know the world, denaturalises the way we have studied the world so far; how it makes many of our theories and approaches, disavowed rationales, erasures and silences, untenable and even obscene.

In the *Raced Markets* special issue, I was especially struck by how Watson's article 'Crusoe, Friday and the raced Market Frame of Orthodox Economics Textbooks' speaks to that. Shilliam and Tilley summarise its importance in the introduction: 'Out of this mode of thought, the model of market exchange remains to this day based implicitly on a fictitious coloniser, imagined to be socially islanded as well geographically marooned, with the racialised and enslaved human on which his accumulation is dependent entirely disavowed.'³³ Considering that the textbook orthodoxy is drawn exclusively from a story that can only imagine Crusoe as the storyteller, Watson's article reminds that the decolonial strategy of desilencing is a generative and necessary one. What if our textbooks were written based on narratives that would have Friday not as merely the protagonist but as storyteller?

The works help us understand how this goes beyond identity politics. Sharpe and Kamugisha set out the value of epistemic Blackness, i.e. centred on the experiences of peoples of African descent, because of their position in colonialism and chattel slavery and their afterlives. 'The stakes for Wynter and James could never be clearer', Kamugisha writes. 'The colonial condemnation that has been the lot of blacks will extend to encompass humanity, if the wisdom and experiences of African diaspora populations, those forced "to pay the most total psycho-existential price" for the Euro-American West's victory is ignored.'³⁴ Bhandar's work on coloniality, property and *propriety* adds an important layer and rationale to the same logic: 'in order for genuine political transformation to occur, the perspectives and political imaginaries of those without property, those in the Margins, must replace the lexicon of rights embedded at the core of much property doctrine.'³⁵

³² For a recent insightful example of how to counter this in the IR classroom see: Jonneke Koomen, 'International Relations/Black Internationalism: Reimagining Teaching and Learning about Global Politics', *International Studies Perspectives* 20 no.0 (2019): 1-22.

³³ Shilliam and Tilley, *Introduction*, 539.

³⁴ Aaron Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality. Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 176.

³⁵ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 23.

After the ISA-Accra conference, I travel further down the coast in Ghana's Central Region. I cannot make it all the way the famous Cape Coast Castle – I am not sure I want to experience this in a tourist setting – so I find myself in one of the smaller castles that dot the Ghanaian coastline. The one I visit is obscenely named 'Fort Patience'. The Dutch were here, the Danish, the Brits. In contrast to our average IR textbooks, the slave castles are edifices that make it impossible to forget; the advent of the mass kidnapping and enslavement of peoples, the co-optation of their kin in that thingifying political economy, and how that logic of divide and conquer continues to shape relations amongst colonised and oppressed peoples today.

My host, a colleague and friend from the University of Ghana in Legon, speaks of the absence of trust in Ghanaian society and politics today. (Our textbooks reduce it to the issue of corruption.) He also draws my attention to the lingering stench in these too small rooms where the kidnapped were piled up in the dark, for weeks and months on end.

Sensorially, I am reminded that in the wake of coloniality, the breathtakingly beautiful is connected to the breathtakingly brutal. Fort Patience offers vistas of paradise shorelines and palm trees, white sandy beaches, idyllic fishermen boats and villages. But also, the stench of thingification; the condemnation and commodification of human flesh and soul.

It takes me to how the most beautiful edifices back in the colonial metropolises, embody the same violent paradox. I think of the majestic Central Station in my hometown Antwerp, Belgium. Ever since I was told about its connection to the bloody and stolen riches from the Congo, I cannot un-see the violence from my mind's eye whenever I look at its beauty. The same holds for all those other beautiful buildings in the streets of Brussels, London, Paris. The Notre Dame.

I am listening to the audiobook *Homegoing* by Ghanaian novelist Yaa Gyasi³⁶. It is an intergenerational and -continental family chronicle spanning transatlantic slavery and colonisation in Ghana and the US to the present. Her evocative description of the quarters in the Castles come to life while I am standing in Fort Patience. The expansive space and time travel in her narrative inspire me to connect some dots, physically and emotionally.

I am transported back to Christina Sharpe's pages; she helps think what would happen to the study of international relations if we were to take what she calls the 'wake work' seriously. She writes:

'(...) I've been trying to articulate a method of encountering the past that is not past. A method along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are. I've been thinking of this gathering, this collecting and reading towards a new analytic, as the wake and wake work, and I am interested in plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially.'³⁷

Sharpe's call makes sense to me here, to all my senses, not just the intellectual.

³⁶ Gyasi Yaa, *Home Going* (London, New York: Penguin, 2016).

³⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 13.

*It occurs to me that I will be in Puerto Rico soon, a current and actual colony of the United States in the Caribbean, literally on the other side of Fort Patience and the water; the other side of colonisation, racism, enslavement and capitalism. The same side of the same story, really. Depending on where we start the story.*³⁸

San Juan, Puerto Rico, mid-August 2019

*'Ricky, renuncia, y llévate a la junta.'*³⁹ I land in a Puerto Rico buzzing with revolutionary excitement of both hope and fear that change might actually be possible. Or neutralised, yet again. I am here to give a talk at the International Congress of Youth Voices, an initiative of American author Dave Eggers. He invited his friend, Haitian author Edwidge Danticat, to give the opening speech. I recognise her name from the pages in Kamugisha's and Sharpe's books. I am ashamed I had not heard of her before, so I hasten to school myself by listening to her audiobook 'Create Dangerously' before meeting her face to face. For four hours and 53 minutes, while dwelling in the Hispanic Caribbean Island of Puerto Rico USA (!), Danticat's collection of essays takes me from Francophone(-ish) Caribbean Haiti to the US and back. Toni Morrison is everywhere. During her keynote Danticat evokes Morisson's Nobel Prize acceptance speech about the old blind lady, the children and the bird, supposedly in their hands. She invites the 150 16- to 22-year-old poets, writers and community organisers to walk with Morisson when thinking about responsibility and their future in a changing climate. Danticat apologises to them, on our behalf. In the days that follow I realise that the youth have a sharper understanding of the imperative of the ethical and what decoloniality might be about. It gives me pause on where and with whom we locate expertise.

We are initiated in the history and current affairs of the Island and it sounds like all the ails of coloniality have congregated at some point in time in Puerto Rico: the extinction of the its native people, the Taíno, after being 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus in 1493 and subsequent colonisation by Spain; the influx of kidnapped and enslaved Africans, followed by recently freed Africans, provided they joined the military to the defend the island colony for the Spanish; its cession to the United States after Spanish defeat together with Guam and the Philippines; ... Coloniality's stories appear as strikingly similar and repetitive across time and space, yet very specific to each place, people and moment.

In September 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria further wrecked the lives, livelihoods and infrastructures that were already fractured by the island's distant and recent history. People's suffering from climate change and environmental degradation was exacerbated by an aggressive neoliberal political economy less and less concerned with even the semblance of democratic

³⁸ A recent issue of the New York Times Magazine titled *Project 1619* is a very useful and insightful resource in this respect. It proposes to start the storytelling of the beginning of the United States with the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in 1619 rather than with the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html> Last accessed September 5 2019.

³⁹ "Ricky, resign, and take the junta with you".

representation or self-determination. In 2016, Puerto Rico's debt crisis brought PROMESA⁴⁰ – like Fort Patience, the name is obscure – and with it came the Junta, a Financial Oversight and Management Board of Puerto Rico, a handful of unelected people, with powers to cut budgets and over-rule local authorities.

It reads like another copy/past operation.

Phinney's article in *Raced Markets* special issue titled 'Detroit's Municipal Bankruptcy: Racialised Geographies of Austerity', examines similar practices in Detroit, USA. She builds on fieldwork and interviews, to show how citizens of a city are (unequally) held responsible for a financial crisis that is beyond their control; how this process is racialized and how the go-to solution is, as usual, the privatisation of public services, i.c. Detroit's water provision. Phinney invites us to: 'devot[e] more attention to how austerity urbanism is being framed, rolled-out, and the material consequences of it, by examining the role of race.'⁴¹

I cannot help but think of the tried and failed Structural Adjustment Programmes, from Africa in the 80s and 90s to Greece today. In neoliberalism, the disposability of the residuum people is not a glitch or failure, but constitutive of the system. Gurminder Bhambra and John Holmwood historicise and illustrate this powerfully in their article on the liberal welfare state 'Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Liberal Welfare State'. They open with the renewed interest in the phenomenon of inequality by the likes of Thomas Piketty and warn against eclipsing colonialism and race and slavery in our conversations about the welfare state. 'Capitalism emerges alongside chattel slavery where it is precisely the case that there is no separation between human individual and his or her labour', they write. 'Under chattel slavery, the individual and not his or her labour power, is treated as a commodity and is detached from the rest of life and 'stored' and 'mobilised'.⁴² They show how (settler) colonialism needs to be taken into account if we are to understand the possibility of solidarity, also for those countries that are not readily associated with colonialism. Their approach questions the centrality of nation-state borders in these analyses by pointing at different entanglements: '(...) if Scandinavian countries⁴³ did not extend formal colonies in the nineteenth century, settler colonialism afforded opportunities for their populations to migrate and that migration contributed to the processes of dispossession and expansion of settlement elsewhere, especially in the United States.'⁴⁴ Their bottom line, which needs careful consideration moving forward, is the following: 'class is race, and addressing their mutual formation will be central to any future organisation for social justice.'⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Puerto Rico Oversight, Mangement and Economic Stability Act of 2016, Spanish for 'promise'.

⁴¹ Sarah Phinney, 'Detroit's Municipal Bankruptcy: Racialised Geographies of Austerity', *New Political Economy* 23 no. 5 (2018): 609-626, 624.

⁴² Gurminder K. Bhambra and John Holmwood, 'Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Liberal Welfare State', *New Political Economy* 23, no. 5 (2018): 574-587, 578.

⁴³In addition to the widely held impression that Scandinavian countries were not central to empire and the colonial project overseas, is the fact that they did colonise the lands of the Sámi people, an Indigenous people located in the Nordic countries and the Russian Kola peninsula. With thanks to Alvina Hoffmann for drawing my attention to this in this context.

⁴⁴ Bhambra and Holmwood, *Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Liberal Welfare State*, 583.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 584.

Amidst this colonial malaise, in the short week I spend in Puerto Rico, I am not hard pressed to sense the place and its people as embodied anti-colonial resistance in all its creativity and joy and perseverance; as a palatable site of and for Sharpe's wake work. It is a place where Kamugisha's epistemic Caribbean dreams are manifest in the Afro-Puerto Rican Bomba, where the musicians follow the dancers instead of the other way around. When thinking about the (im)possibility of (the road to) anticolonial alternatives, Kamugisha reminds us that 'Creolization as a cultural concept simply does not exist outside the categories of force, theft, subversion, and abduction in both its conservative and liberatory potentialities.'⁴⁶ In the streets of San Juan, Gloria Wekker's anti-colonial anti-racist intersectionality resonates with *La Colectiva Feminista*. These activists built on years of organising and are the first to call the people to the streets, successfully ousting governor Ricardo *Ricky* Rosselló with non-violent, non-hierarchical and highly creative⁴⁷ protests, bringing all of society together, around the idea of dignity.

I think that it is somewhere here, in the messy, the poetic, the unfinished, that we have to locate radical alternatives.

I wonder what anti-colonial IR, a discipline that contributes to creating and understanding this, would look like.

Conclusion.

*'I have never lived, nor any of us, in a world in which race did not matter. Such a world, free of racial hierarchy, is usually imagined or described as dreamscape - Edenesque, utopian, so remote are the possibilities of its achievement. ... How to be both free and situated: how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home. How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling?'*⁴⁸

*'Radical social change is inconceivable without anticolonial thought and practice.'*⁴⁹

London, UK, early summer 2019. *I participate in a workshop at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) with colleagues from several top US and UK universities to think about global IR. At some point, someone wonders about the limits of 'what IR allows us to do'. It is not the first time that I hear IR being referred to as something with a mind and an agency of its*

⁴⁶ Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality*, 82.

⁴⁷ E.g.: at 11PM the police would, using teargas, declare curfew and order people to go home and sleep; the protesters started collecting Puerto Rican bed-time stories and took turns reading them out loud. Realising that very few people had ever read the constitution and fearing that the rights enshrined within risked being put to bed, they also organised to read out the constitution during the protests.

⁴⁸ Toni Morrison, *Home* (New York: Random House, 2012).

⁴⁹ Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality*, 176.

own. Every time though, I am struck by the profoundly a-political, disavowing nature of such question. If not the people in that room, who defines what IR ‘allows’ us to do? It is us, every time we put together syllabi, teach, write (hand)books and articles or draw up research agendas. A more appropriate question would be: ‘what do we want IR to look like?’

Chicago, USA, mid-September 2019. I am at a workshop at De Paul University with handful of colleagues to contemplate exactly this. We focus on the figure of Thomas Sankara, the late revolutionary president of Burkina Faso (1983-7). We read from the collection of his various speeches titled ‘Thomas Sankara Speaks’⁵⁰. Halfway through our conversations my eye falls on the end of his ‘Black Harlem in the White House’ speech and it dawns on me that concrete clues for how to go about this are literally everywhere. As far as they eye can see. On 3 October 1984, a day before his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Thomas Sankara addresses a crowd of 500 gathered by the Patrice Lumumba Coalition at the Harriet Tubman School in Harlem, NY⁵¹. He ends his talk like this:

‘That is why I ask you to repeat:
 When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!
 [Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”]
 Again!
 [Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”]
 Again!
 [Shouts of “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles!”] [Applause]
 Imperialism!
 [Shouts of “Down with it!”]
 Imperialism!
 [Shouts of “Down with it!”]
 Puppet regimes!
 [Shouts of “Down with them!”]
 Racism!
 [Shouts of “Down with it!”]
 Zionism!
 [Shouts of “Down with it!”]
 Neocolonialism!
 [Shouts of “Down with it!”]
 Glory!
 [Shouts of “To the People!”]

⁵⁰ Michel Prairie ed. *Thomas Sankara Speaks. The Burkina Faso Revolution 1883-1887* (Atlanta: Pathfinder Press, 2007).

⁵¹ The names in this sentence illustrate what I mean with epistemic Blackness or centring knowledges and experiences of peoples of African descent. There is no pre-set definition or delineation in terms of geography or time, or identity even. Nor is it a source of knowing that is superior in and of itself, ontologically. It is a centring that makes sense relationally; for instance, from a western positionality today, as it is grounded in a concrete history of oppression, thing-ification, silencing, erasure and epistemicide; materially and immaterially.

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3 Dignity!
4 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
5 Music!
6 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
7 Health!
8 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
9 Education!
10 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
11 Power!
12 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
13 All the Power!
14 *[Shouts of “To the People!”]*
15 Homeland or death, we will win!
16 Homeland or death, we will win!
17 Thank you, comrades.
18 *[Prolonged applause]*⁵²

24 How is this not IR? What if I were to organise my introductory IR syllabus around these themes?
25 The works in this review add a life-affirming query to this question: Seeing as how generative in
26 terms of topics, places, times, registers and imaginaries, they are, how can we not centre our study
27 of the global on capitalism, race, racism and the colonial? Like Trump and D-Day, if we cannot
28 produce an IR that is less squeamish about calling out Woodrow Wilson’s white supremacy and
29 discussing his contribution to IR in that light, than systematically silencing and erasing Black
30 experiences including slavery and colonialism as foundational and constitutive features of the
31 global society we are trying to make sense of, then what are we doing really?

32 Sharpe invites us to think an IR that ‘dreams Haiti’ rather than the American dream, ‘to enter and
33 inhabit the dream and the reality of revolution.’⁵³ Next to desilencing the experiences and
34 knowledges of peoples of African descent⁵⁴, we need to go beyond *adding*, towards *centring* them
35 in a way that does not reproduce a desire for colonising hierarchies.⁵⁵

36 This invitation will look differently depending on our positionalities. I read these works as a visible
37 child of colonialism located in the West, and the Western academy in particular. To imagine IR
38 anti-colonially requires from those of us at the hegemonic centre a willingness to a dislocation of
39 power; an openness to (have others) redefine expertise and rigour, and to discomfort in the face of
40 new knowledges.
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50 ⁵² Prairie, *Thomas Sankara Speaks*, 152-153.

51 ⁵³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 109.

52 ⁵⁴ This can be read inclusively, i.e. non-competitively and additionally – not instead, as peoples onto which the various
53 violences of coloniality have been inflicted.

54 ⁵⁵ E.g. Enrique Dussel refers in this context to the decolonial distinction between the *will-to-life* v. the *will-to-power*.
55 Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 78.

1 While reading Kamugisha's *Beyond Coloniality*, I was at times overwhelmed by the wealth of
2 information and literatures. For a reader like myself, who has only recently been exposed to
3 Caribbean literatures as places from which to start her thinking about the international, every page
4 reminded me of how much I do not know, and how that ignorance is not random, but systematic.
5 Rather than feeling intimidated, I tried to look at all the names and references dancing on those
6 pages as generous and interesting people I am being introduced to at the most life-affirming party
7 in town; a party with great music and poetry too, because meaningful dances and conversations
8 are to be had. Urgently.

9 The works in this review do indeed convey a sense of urgency, as they speak directly to who and
10 what is allowed to live or is condemned to (social) death and violence in the colonial status quo.
11 As such, they reveal that the 'is-it-class-or-race' debates are moot, a distraction even. It is always
12 both, in the sense that genuine anti-racist work needs a clear rejection of capitalism and
13 neoliberalism and the fight against inequality cannot be colour-blind.

14 I have offered a narrative, unfinished, reading of them through autobiographical example, to
15 illustrate the pervasiveness yet situatedness of coloniality, race and neoliberalism in our everyday.
16 I tie my readings and observations to the discipline of IR, not to save it, or for its own sake. The
17 aim has been to reclaim IR as a place from which to understand, study and imagine the world anti-
18 colonially. A generative reading of Sharpe, Wekker, Kamugisha, Bhandar, Shilliam and Tilley et
19 al. helps us with that.
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