

Naeem Inayatullah & David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004, 234 pp., £55.00 hbk., £17.99 pbk.).

Influenced by the heroic period of the late 1980s, Inayatullah and Blaney argue that IR is the most appropriate sub-field within political science to account for the problem of difference. Unfortunately, they argue, IR fails to take advantage of such an opportunity because 'it is hamstrung by a relative incapacity to speak about the situations of the Third World', and because 'IR as a discipline does not (except very thinly) assess the quality of cultural interactions that shape and are shaped by the changing structures and processes of the international system' (p. 1). The authors eschew foundational contentions of mainstream international theories

by arguing that 'in its conventional neorealist and neoliberal guises, IR misses the way international society—as both a system of states and a world political economy—forms a competition of cultures in which the principles of sovereignty and self-help work to sanctify inequality and subjugate those outside of the centres of the West' (p. 2).

The authors propose that the shortcomings of IR are based on two factors. First, IR is constituted by the legacy of colonialism. Second, IR is currently relatively incapable of 'acknowledging, confronting, and exploring difference' (p. 3). In the first part of the book the authors investigate these shortcomings by examining medieval and early modern contexts, and theories of modernisation. In the first chapter the authors ask, 'how does the *problem of difference* emerge with Westphalia?' (p. 22, original emphasis). They argue that the Westphalian settlement 'intensified the difficulties we face in responding to differences in culture, religion, and mode of life', because this modern and systematic way of asserting equality often created 'forms of social hierarchy—the making of the other as inferior' (pp. 22-3). In the second chapter the authors search for the possibility of 'alternative' actions by states in an attempt to create equality. In pursuing these tasks the authors survey sixteenth and seventeenth century thinking. It is perplexing that they do not use Bartolomé de Las Casas to make their illustration of the Amerindians' common humanity with the Europeans, especially since de Las Casas represents a well-known response to Europe's discovery of the Amerindians. Nevertheless, Blaney and Inayatullah successfully draw on less utilised thinkers such as Vitoria, de Léry, Grotius, and Campella to illustrate the dominant European view of the Amerindian 'other'.

The third chapter examines contemporary IR as a variant of modernisation theory. The authors conceive that IR's difficulties in accounting for difference are due to the fact that 'modernisation theory takes for granted the spatial demarcations of geopolitics by which difference is contained and domesticated' (p. 94), and because 'modernisation theory identifies those [who are] barbarous, and those different' (p. 95). They illustrate how modernisation theory attempts to eradicate difference with two 'familiar binaries—the spatial demarcation of inside/ outside and the development sequence of tradition/modernity' (p. 95). This claim against the systematic and comparative analysis of political life troubles the authors because it seems impossible to solve problems without systematically comparing variables.

In the second part the authors attempt to re-describe IPE by arguing that 'competition should be seen as a social practice that juxtaposes certain values and principles while centring a certain type of self and framing its relations with others' (p. 162). In other words: 'IPE is a particular form characterised by an ongoing attempt to mediate the opposition between the principles of equality and social hierarchy and

between identity and difference through the staging of competitions' (p. 163). At this point the authors attempt to make sense of IPE by positing an ethnological approach to the subject, but they fail to propose different hypotheses or to theorise an ethnological IPE. It seems that they just throw ideas into the air without coherently theorising them, jettisoning a comparative and systematic analysis of the variables. The last chapter is an attempt to illustrate how sovereign boundaries are not absolute. The authors argue that sovereignties are multiple and overlapping because we see 'increasingly complex and relative borderlines, shaped by transnational flows and multilayered processes and institutions that construct varied kinds of multiply scaled mediations between the inside and the outside of political communities' (p. 213). To illustrate their claims, the authors examine the dichotomy between an overlapping understanding of property in pre-British India and a more modern idea of property imposed by British rule (p. 190). The authors conclude 'that the older, more disaggregated understanding of landed property provides a corrective to our understanding of the naturalness of the reign of straight lines' (p. 190).

International Relations and the Problem of Difference is an excellent book that provides a fresh and distinct historical reading of various early political thinkers, while attempting to advance critical theory by illustrating the need to take culture seriously in IR. The book is exceptionally well developed and argued throughout. Unfortunately, however, it lacks coherent prescriptions for theorising about world politics since it eschews a systematic comparative analysis of social relations.

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