

THE URGENCY OF NEW HISTORIOGRAPHIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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There are few critical moments in history that compel societies to rethink the organizing constructs around which we understand our social worlds. In international relations (IR), major revolutions—the Haitian, French, and American revolutions, various world wars and civil wars, and the end of the Cold War, as well as various civil rights revolutions—presented moments for reexamining international affairs orthodoxies. One recent moment for reflecting on the ideologies that have shaped particular ways of seeing the world was the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, which took the life of more than 2,000 Americans. Yet, while the destruction of the World Trade Center—as a symbol of American capitalism—was only secondary to the loss of lives, it was the explicit anti-American sentiments that called into question social perceptions about the victories of American democracy. This event not only made public the fictions of democracy, but also marked a new phase in the US-articulated global war on terror and the related constructions of the “enemy combatant” and “Muslim terrorist.” Today, these social constructs hold meaning because of the way that interpretations of events and their institutionalized practices, theories, and conceptions shape how we understand and structure social truths. They structure the norms that form our assumptions about social orders and our place within them. These assessments produce the lines of inquiry that impact public policy and, by extension, shape various knowledge forms.

Published in 2006, at a time of vast transformations in the international domain, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* is the second of an intended trilogy of books written by Siba Grovogui that interrogates the various knowledge forms that have emerged to explain contemporary international relations. From hegemony to misconceptualizations of the Global South, Grovogui insists that IR needs to be more responsive to different subjects and actors, thereby demonstrating how a rereading of various

events and political experiments in France’s former colonies calls into question preexisting narratives in the postwar period and sheds new light on how we understand global politics. Pondering the events that preceded and followed the Cold War era, he argues that the political mechanisms and instruments of global politics and governance from the Cold War era remained intact long after the threat of nuclear annihilation by the superpowers was subdued. These modalities, which also involved the colonization of states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, preceded the Cold War and had implications for the subsequent forms of knowledge that were violently unleashed against anticolonial mobilizations in subsequent periods and actually led to the transformations of Cold War and post-Cold War international politics.

As Grovogui insists, the post-WWII violence in the colonies and the eventual independence of states previously colonized for extractive purposes were nominally transformed into democratic nations. However, deep-seated sentimentalisms found expression in various ethnic, linguistic, and certainly Pan-Africanist slogans, images, parables, and adages. As he argued, the 1990s prodemocracy rhetoric that emerged following Cold War victories cast states as democratic bodies. However, while it is true that the forms of liberalism and democracy that unfolded into an era of US unipolar power left little room for rational dissent, the next chapter of twenty-first-century violence in parts of Africa, Asia, and South and Central America took a surprising turn that either Grovogui was not able to anticipate or that he misread. What emerged, following such forms of historical violence, were democratic alliances that were epistemically divergent. Post-Cold War formations took on a revolutionary façade that—as a result of fictitious constructs about the promise of democracy and law—were actually far more violent. The new post-Cold War realities were also ideological but involved prodemocracy dictates that were questionable. Talk of transparency, accountability, and legality shaped the activist landscape. Transitional justice discourses became the triumphant refrain and a narrow legally driven justice language accompanied it.¹ Justice became coupled with legal-

1. See Clarke, “Refiguring the Perpetrator.”

ity and criminal responsibility was individualized. Both concepts were communicated through a narrative coupling that was intolerant of impunity. Yet, even with its talk of “justice,” post–Cold War democracies were unable to achieve the fruits of their promise. Democracy had its limits, and the limits became more evident with the explicit exclusions and paradoxes that formed the backdrop of our new global orders.

In what remains, I ponder Grovogui’s central point concerning the relationship between Western democratic intellectual anxieties and postcolonial methods and modes of thought where, in an effort to interrogate knowledge production through intellectually relevant epistemologies, he calls into question Western liberalist, relativist, and universal approaches to our democratic fictions. While this intervention—some ten years since its publication—seems self-evident now, Grovogui’s particular rereading of postwar France, its colonial and postcolonial relations, and US international policies still make the book extremely compelling—especially for critical audiences interested in making sense of the workings of empire. One domain for interrogating the contemporary significance of *Beyond Eurocentrism* is the call for new ontologies and interpretive humility that might allow us to make sense of the type of liberalist transformations that unfolded at the time of and well beyond Grovogui’s publication. For as he suggests, new modalities for the militarization of daily life, set alongside the shape of liberal democratic forms, demand a rethinking of democracy and its paradoxes. One such contemporary paradox is the legal deployment of violence to address conflict after the unleashing of violence. This is not new in human history. But its increasing uses in twenty-first-century democracies—through humanitarian Responsibility to Protect (R2P) discourses—have emerged at a time when preemptive violence is being justified in the name of human rights and sustained through the moralist fabric of contemporary democracies. These moral democratic precepts find their most acute manifestations in increasingly judicialized formations. They have implications for the way that we understand post-

colonial social worlds and also have implications for the ontological precepts that govern meaning production—especially as it relates to the dual direction of colonial relationships.

The complexities of empire and colonial and postcolonial thought are firmly grounded in Grovogui’s point of departure for the book. But what is not as clear are the complex ways that democracy has taken hold in post–Cold War domains and what that might mean now as we ponder the future of new epistemologies around democracy, legality, and justice. It is true that various moral orders have their own ontological logic, as Grovogui demonstrated through his discussion of Félix Éboué’s life and roles. But in attempts to decontextualize and recontextualize social meanings, the agents of the French Republic with their complex positions used a range of strategies to communicate their message. One can only imagine how the intentional cadence and tone, the sites of expression and imagery might have offered these agents the possibility of undermining various forms of hegemonic power. In Grovogui’s example of Éboué’s recognition of modern conceptions of power, it was clear that Éboué’s attempt to rethink emergent republican values should be seen through his attempts to better illustrate, as Grovogui says, the “promises and limits of republicanism.”² Yet, Grovogui later concedes that aesthetic silences are part of the challenge of rereading the historical archive. One such silence is how to read into archival transcripts forms of communication that are articulated and represented through sentimental performances of alliance or distinction. For while Éboué, a French colonial representative born in the Antilles islands, articulated messages made viable through his relationship to the republic, the reality is that his shared relationship to blackness and his African heritage were probably made explicit not just through formal declarations of unity to the republic. Rather, his alliances with blackness were likely to have been reinforced through forms often deemed unintelligible in the archive—those communicative forms made explicit through orality and bodily practices, dialect inflections, symbols, and communicative structures made viable

2. Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism*, 142.

through aurality. These communicative forms are at once representational and aesthetic and operate within a hierarchy of genres and styles that concretize particular aesthetic regimes and make visible particular ways of imagining and envisioning the world. What is at stake is a clarification of how politics and worldviews are shaped through what Jacques Rancière referred to as the disruption of a particular aesthetic organization and the eruption of a distinct aesthetics.³

What we have with the complex figures in Grovogui's book is the production of ways of reading humanism and democratic alliances through the production of common sensibilities. These sensibilities are ideological but manifest through preset aesthetic forms that present themselves to the senses.⁴ And this is where the aesthetic register of democracy emerges as a form of sense making in which politics is used as a modality of knowledge and power. Following Rancière, we might assume that now, as in the French colonization of Africa and the Caribbean, *the political* emerges when eruptions of the senses are presented within competing aesthetic enterprises. When this happens, the distribution of what is known and rendered sensible must be expanded to include competing aesthetic values. What Grovogui's discussion of Éboué tells us, therefore, is not just that there are profoundly diverse ontologies for making sense of republicanism in French colonies; it also tells us that the disruption of the republic through the figure and message of Éboué requires both the disruption of particular ways of understanding colonial relations as well as a recognition that new communicative forms can produce an internal eruption in how agents of change in France's former colonies, for example, came to understand their social world. It also highlights how we ought to make sense of the colonies' place in the history of the world order and how intentions can be resignified through the decontextualization and recontextualization of meaning. This resignification is not unrelated to new formations in contemporary life—such as what has happened with the language of democracy and justice in international relations.

Some ten years after *Beyond Eurocentrism*, we

are seeing anew the aesthetic modalities of knowledge and power profoundly transforming the way that mainstream democratic sensibilities are shaping that which is deemed actionable morality. This is happening through a range of knowledge and legal technologies that are contributing to the spread and consumption of interwoven images and icons. Such new formations provide a template for thinking about the primacy of the senses of justice in past colonial encounters. They call on us to consider how new democratic forms of participation are being mobilized and recontextualized for new purposes.

In international relations, popular democratic sensibilities are being reconstituted in part through the appeal to human rights principles and obligations. This has emerged with the language of contemporary democracy in which participation in the democratic ethos has involved compliance with humanitarian responsibilities and it has—by extension—constructed a “victim” to be saved. As we entered the twenty-first century, international discourses about the victim began playing a critical role in establishing an expansive justice discourse. But the formation of democratic and judicial mechanisms to protect victims was only part of the story. The contemporary manifestation of the R2P doctrine not only changed the terms for democratic participation through an expansive language of human rights protection; it also transformed the terms for political sense making. For a new reality was at play that connected the moral impetus for rule-of-law interventions with a pragmatic, protectionist one: These new discourses wedded traditional approaches to domestic state action to the expansion of human rights and international criminal law, leading to a shift in the focus from states and state protection to the protection of persons and peoples.⁵ With the shift to individuals, the idea of the “victim” to be protected emerged as the concrete beneficiary of justice. This shift was accompanied by a new democratic discourse, based on a parallel humanitarian regime guided by the laws of war,⁶ that incorporated dimensions of democratization and political and social transformations.

3. See Rancière, *Disagreement*.

4. *Ibid.*, 13.

5. See Teitel, *Transitional Justice*.

6. See Focarelli, “The Responsibility to Protect Doctrine.”

These changes in legal and moral discourses were propelled by the pressures of laissez-faire globalization and affected the ways that state sovereignty and state borders were being reconfigured. They also had implications for the way that domestic laws were being reformulated through the incorporation of international treaties, and national laws were reworked with the introduction of bilateral agreements and new regional conventions and formations. Alongside the earlier forms of economic neoliberal reconfigurations and prodemocracy, World Bank–driven policy reformulations of the late twentieth century was the adoption of new humanitarian principles. These principles appear in various UN resolutions and international treaties, including the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, that reconfigured the reach of law and located the individual at the center of foreign affairs. This figure of the individual was both articulated through a discourse surrounding the high-level “perpetrator,” criminally responsible for mass atrocities, and the “victim” to be saved from the perpetrator’s violence. Both figures—the perpetrator and the victim—were central to the merger of humanitarianism with foreign policy making and international law mechanisms. However, the court focused on the body and physical suffering of the individual victim, not the larger structural forms of victimhood caused by conditions of economic or political marginalization. With this focus on the individual victim to be protected from mass violence against an individual perpetrator, those at risk of what was seen as the worst forms of violence were entitled to legal protection through an emergent discourse known as the “responsibility to protect.”⁷

Yet, this transformation of R2P as a moral discourse required the production of an attendant aesthetic field. It required decontextualization of Western democracy as embedded in the state and

a recontextualization of it through a universal language of humanitarian protection and deterritorial obligations. Yet in some cases these democratic discourses served to provide the moral authority for the pursuit of war and, in doing so, they demonstrated how the recontextualization of particular sentiments operates through the reconfiguration of sense making.

Recontextualizing Democratic Obligations

In September 1999 in the Hague, on the centennial of the first International Peace conference, Kofi Annan, the then secretary general of the United Nations, delivered a critical speech in which he challenged states to address “two equally compelling interests” at once.⁸ Titled “The Effectiveness of the International Rule of Law in Maintaining International Peace and Security,” Annan called for the production of an effective response to human rights abuses. The other interest was concerned with the development of a mechanism through which states could act with universal legitimacy.⁹ In 2001, following the failure of the international community to act to prevent or stop the Rwandan genocide, the African Union reinforced the idea that the international community had a responsibility to protect state populations in situations of crisis.¹⁰ Article 4 of the AU’s constitutive act was drafted to assert “the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.”¹¹

Some four years later, the UN General Assembly produced a declaration clarifying the “Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.”¹² This declaration articulated a universal set of

7. Clarke, “Refiguring the Perpetrator.”

8. Kofi Annan, “The Effectiveness of the International Rule of Law in Maintaining International Peace and Security,” Secretary-General Address to the United Nations General Assembly, May 18, 1999. See UN Press Release SG/SM/6997, “Secretary-General Says Renewal of Effectiveness and Relevance of Security Council Must Be Cornerstone of Efforts to Promote International Peace in Next Century,” ac-

cessed November 10, 2015, www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990518.SGSM6997.html.

9. Koulen, “The Responsibility to Protect.”

10. See Kioko, “The Right of Intervention.”

11. Article 4, “Principles,” Constitutive Act of the African Union, accessed August 25, 2015, www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/Constitutive_Act_en_o.htm#Article4.

12. “Principles on Right to Reparations for Victims of Gross Human Rights Violations Approved by Third Committee,” UN General Assembly Press Release, November 10, 2005, www.un.org/press/en/2005/gashc3838.doc.htm.

guidelines for victims. By 2005, the AU had adopted the Ezulwini Consensus,¹³ which provided African states with an African regional tool to address mass atrocities.

The foundation of R2P is built on the idea that a state has a responsibility to protect its population from gross human rights violations. These include crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. The second component involves the assumption that the international community has a responsibility to assist states in fulfilling that primary responsibility to protect its population. And finally, if a state fails to protect its citizens from the four crimes of concern, and if it has failed to maintain peaceful measures, the international community has a responsibility to intervene using the most effective and appropriate means, ranging from economic sanctions to coercive measures, with military intervention as a last resort.¹⁴

The R2P discourse is not simply a moral architecture of the contemporary period. The notion of an obligation to protect the victim was driven by a force of law deployed across sovereign borders with expanded jurisdictional reach. This expansion of activity reflected a fundamental shift from the regulated affairs of the state to the expansion of global governance mechanisms known to operate from the north to the south, particularly in Africa and Latin America. These regions reflect the continuity of economic dependencies, hence the need to manage political compliance with legal protections. The establishment of new ad hoc tribunals, international treaties, decrees, and charters promoted the legal frameworks that made this possible. And the notion of the “individual to be protected” joined with new international humanitarian and judicial mechanisms that provided the

vocabulary for popularizing these radically new and fundamentally transformative formations.¹⁵ Key to the development of these mechanisms was a deeply retributive justice system described as being in place to punish the guilty and thereby end impunity. With this transformation of democratic obligations, the decontextualization of post-Cold War democracy took shape and set into place new considerations for the project Grovogui set out to map. For by 1985, the United Nations General Assembly first adopted the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (the Victims’ Declaration),¹⁶ which revolutionized the ordinary usage of the term *victim*. This declaration became the cornerstone of legal rights for victims under international law. By decontextualizing the role of the state, it established victims’ rights in the international criminal justice process. This included the right to access international justice institutions, to be treated with basic respect and dignity, and to be entitled to protection assistance and to reparations.

R2P and Its Indeterminancies: Decontextualizations, Recontextualizations, and Legal Justifications for War

The UN Victims’ Declaration laid the foundation for the negotiations on how the victim was to be defined in the ICC texts during the preparatory committee discussions, leading to the signing of the Rome Statute in 1998. Interestingly, after extensive debates on whether or not legal entities could also be included in the definition of the term *victim*, a compromise was reached in the ICC Rules of Procedure and Evidence, which established that victims may include organizations or institutions.¹⁷ Despite this, the definition popularized by ICC agents involved the recontextualization of the notions of victims and justice in ways that

13. “The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: ‘The Ezulwini Consensus,’” African Union Executive Council, Seventh Extraordinary Session, March 7–8, 2005, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, www.safpi.org/sites/default/files/publications/au_executive_council_ezulwini_consensus.pdf.

14. See Stahn, “Responsibility to Protect,” and “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly: 2005 World Summit Outcome,” UN General Assembly Sixtieth Session, October 24, 2005 (A/RES/60/1, para. 138–40), accessed No-

15. See Stahn, “Responsibility to Protect”; Focarelli, “The Responsibility to Protect Doctrine”; and Schimmel, “The Moral Case for Restorative Justice.”

16. “Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power,” UN General Assembly, Fortieth Session, 96th Plenary Meeting, November 29, 1985, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/40/34.

17. Rules of Procedure and Evidence of the International Criminal Court, Rule 85(b), ICC-ASP/1/3, at 10, and Corr. 1 (2002), UN Doc. PCNICC/2000/1/Add.1 (2000), accessed November 10, 2015, www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/PIDS/legal-texts/RulesProcedureEvidenceEng.pdf.

heralded a discourse driven by the Rome Statute's conviction that "all peoples are united by common bonds" that could be shattered at any time through violence. It also claimed that millions of children, women, and men have been "victims of unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the conscience of humanity."¹⁸ During the negotiations of the statute, emphasis was placed on ensuring that the core values of the court—to promote greater peace and security through accountability for crimes, as well as the rights and the dignity of the victims—were to be respected.¹⁹ This involved recontextualizing the language of justice as being fundamentally tied to international adjudication.

The Victims' Rights Working Group was also created in 1997, under the auspices of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, in order to work with various victims' representatives to help them participate in the proceedings or to inform them of judicial developments related to their case. The Victims Participation and Reparations Section (VPRS) of the ICC's registry conducts regular assessments and evaluations of its work, and it sees itself as committed to a reflective learning process as its staff implements the court's mandate in situation countries. The mission is communicated in a prevailing discourse of defending victims and ending impunity through the rule of law. The centrality of victims at the center of the trust fund's work is enabled through the mobilization of ICC judicial proceedings. It is an example of the way that international criminal law is actually a by-product of a changing world of neoliberal governance and the resulting forms of executive governance in the Global South, and Africa in particular. The reality is that the viability of discourses depends on the recontextualization of notions like justice and victim as key components of contemporary democracies for they provide the moral force for the reinscription of legality and force in conflict settings. Ultimately, the emergent aesthetics of the "victim to be saved" discourse as the basis for a legal form

of justice represents the decontextualization and recontextualization of a new moral architecture that has become explicit in international relations since the publication of *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*.

And as we have seen, however morally outstanding the notion of the "individual to be protected" may appear to be, the history of empire reflects histories of colonial extraction, the transformation of their societies, and the production of economic dependencies in which the victim has become recontextualized through the democratic prism. For Grovogui, this transformation takes on a different significance that seems unanticipated but not unsurprising. He was then, as he is now, committed to making sense of contemporary encounters and tracing how we make sense of international relationships and their erasures. Thus, as a study of the elisions of knowledge forms, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*—some ten years after its publication—can be read as anticipating the significant transformations that would unfold in the first decades of the twenty-first century. It is clear that the key tenets of the book remain as critical now as they were at the time and that Grovogui's interest in shifting our paradigms for understanding and teaching international relations sets the framework for this rethinking. Not only do we continue to see continuities in material and symbolic forms of power playing out in international relations, but we also see how knowledge frameworks used to understand new formations require just as urgent reexaminations. For the need for new historiographies for reading global relationships of power demands that we counter the disciplinary limits of our purview and expand possibilities for rethinking various postwar democratic alliances being expressed and rearticulated. *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy* offers this template, and its relevance should be celebrated during this tenth anniversary. ■■■■

18. UN General Assembly, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010), Preamble, July 17, 1998, accessed November 10, 2015, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3a84.html.

19. See Schabas, *Introduction*.

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