



## Book Review on The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary

*Küresel Uluslararası İlişkilerin Yapılanması: Yüzcüncü Yılında Uİ'nin Kökenleri ve Evrimi Adlı Eserin Kitap İncelemesi*

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### ABSTRACT

The quest for Global IR brings important transformations to the International Relations (IR) discipline. It calls for the inclusion of non-Western approaches into the discipline. Acharya and Buzan are pioneers of this transformation. They began their research with non-Western IR and turned it into Global IR, which aims to prevent the parochialism of both Western and non-Western IR, but rather mutual construction. Their book *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary* is a crucial step in achieving this aim. It successfully demonstrates the intertwined relations between international political developments and IR through its world history approach. However, the book has its constraints as well. It prioritizes the core/the West in its structural formation and focuses exclusively on the English language rather than incorporating local scholars. More importantly, the book overlooks the non-Western contributions that fail to find a place in core Western IR. It requires such approaches to de-provincialize themselves and extend beyond their regions to be recognized as valuable theories. This shifts the gatekeeper role from the Western IR to Global IR, which can decide whether an approach is valuable based on its representation in Western IR and its ability to have global applicability. This paper provides a critical review of the book while highlighting its significant contributions to Global IR.

**Keywords:** Global IR, Non-Western IR, World History Approach

### ÖZET

Küresel Uluslararası İlişkiler (Uİ) yaklaşımı Batı merkezliliği aşım Batı-dışı yaklaşımların disipline entegre edilmesi çağrısında bulunarak Uİ disiplini için önemli bir dönüşümü temsil etmektedir. Acharya ve Buzan, bu değişim sürecinin öncülerindedir. Çalışmalarına Batı-dışı Uİ teorilerine odaklanarak başlamış olsalar da daha sonra Küresel Uİ perspektifini benimseyerek batı veya batı-dışı teorilerden herhangi birinin hakim konuma gelmesini doğru bulmadıklarını belirtmişler ve bu ikisinin karşılıklı inşa ettiği yeni bir yüze ihtiyaç olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Yazarların *Küresel Uluslararası İlişkilerin Yapılanması: Yüzcüncü Yılında Uİ'nin Kökenleri ve Evrimi* adlı eseri bu hedef için önemli bir adımdır. Kitap, dünya tarihi yaklaşımını kullanarak tarihi gelişmeler ve Uİ disiplini arasında içiçe geçmiş bağları başarılı bir şekilde göstermektedir. Ancak kitap kısıtlılıklardan uzak değildir. Kitabın formatı merkez/Batı yapısını incelemekte ve yerel akademisyenleri entegre etmek yerine İngilizce kaynaklara odaklanmaktadır. Daha da önemlisi kitap, merkez Batı Uİ'de yer bulamayan Batı-dışı yaklaşımları göz ardı etmektedir. Bu tür yaklaşımların kendilerini yerellikten arındırmaları ve bölgelerinin ötesine uzanmaları, değerli teoriler olarak kabul edilmeleri için şart koşulmuştur. Böylelikle Batı-merkezli Uİ'nin sahip olduğu beççilik görevini dolaylı olarak Küresel Uİ'ye devretmektedir. Bu beççi, Batı-dışı yaklaşımların bölgelerini aşım küresel bir uygulama alanına sahip olup olmadığına bakarak onlara değer biçme vazifesini taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma ile ilgili kitabın Küresel Uİ'ye yaptığı önemli katkıların altı çizilirken eleştirel bir bakış açısı ile incelemesi yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Küresel Uluslararası İlişkiler, Batı-Dışı Uluslararası İlişkiler, Dünya Tarihi Yaklaşımı

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The book makes a significant contribution to Global IR through its world history perspective.
- The book's structure prioritizes the core/the West, thereby maintaining the peripheral status of the periphery.
- The main problem with the book is that the non-Western contributions to Global IR are evaluated based on their resonance within the Western IR community.

## 1. Introduction

The study of Non-Western International Relations (IR) has increasingly taken the form of Global IR in recent years. Scholars worldwide contribute to this discussion by providing alternative approaches, challenging mainstream IR, focusing on global history and writing criticism. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan are among the pioneers of both Non-Western IR and Global IR (Acharya, 2014). They initiated their study on Non-Western IR with the question, "Why is there no Non-Western International Relations theory?" (Acharya & Buzan, 2007). They elaborate on the issue with the contributions of many Non-Western scholars in their book *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (Acharya & Buzan, 2010, p. 1). Later, as Acharya and Buzan also admit, they shift their intellectual focus from Non-Western IR to global IR, realizing that combining Western and Non-Western contributions to IR is necessary rather than eliminating the former (2019, pp. 297–298). Through this method, the IR discipline could prevent the establishment of a new parochialism (Non-Western) and reach what is called "Global IR" (Acharya & Buzan, 2017, p. 341). The book *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* focuses on this mission and aims to observe the history of international relations (ir) and discipline of IR with a world history perspective rather than being Eurocentric or Western-centric (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). For this purpose, the term "ir" is used to describe the international relations as the practical world of world politics, while the "IR" is used for the discipline. Thus, Acharya and Buzan's study on global IR can be perceived as a continuation of their work in 2010 as a reformist intellectual project (2019, p. vii). As Chapter 9 of the *Non-Western International Relations Theory* states, in order to establish a Non-Western IR, scholars should approach the discipline's development from a world history perspective (Buzan & Little, 2010, pp. 197–198). This new book serves as a crucial contribution to Global IR with its global historical perspective.

## 2. Review

### 2.1. Structure and Main Contributions of the Book

The book is composed of ten chapters with a two-fold structure. Each of the two chapters is related to the other. The first chapter provides the ir of the related era, while the following chapter focuses on the IR discipline's development during the same period. Through this method and focusing on three main themes, Acharya and Buzan aim to demonstrate that the ir and the IR are intertwined and shape each other to a great extent. The three main themes for this purpose are the myth of the 1919 establishment of the IR discipline, five historical periods since the 1900s<sup>1</sup> and GIS (Global International Society). Acharya and Buzan borrowed the concept of GIS from Buzan and Schouenborg (2018), which focuses on differences and similarities among GIS through a historical perspective. They renamed it GIS 1.0, GIS 1.1, and GIS 1.2 (emerging deep pluralism) (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 261), demonstrating their relevance for the time period (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 6). With the expansion of the European societal system to the rest of the world, the first GIS (1.0) – called *Western-colonial GIS* – emerged (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 19). Though Western-centrism of GIS systems persisted, each change in GIS reduced the intensity of Western-centrism in ir and IR (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, pp. 79, 261). They focus on this structure to determine whether there were any changes in response to historical events. As they state, "IR is to some extent a slave to current events" (2019, p. 4) while "in turn [IR] influence how people understand the world they are in and therefore shapes how they act" (2019, p. 4). This methodology is a substantial contribution to attaching practice to theory, which is often a neglected part of studies. According to their

<sup>1</sup> These are 1919, 1919-1945 (interwar), 1945-1989 (Cold War), after 1989 (post-Cold War), and the current era as emerging deep pluralism.

interpretation, current events are signs of change towards a post-Western era that would bring a truly Global IR, and their book lays the foundations for it (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, pp. 285–295). Figure 1 below visualizes the structure and organization of the book.

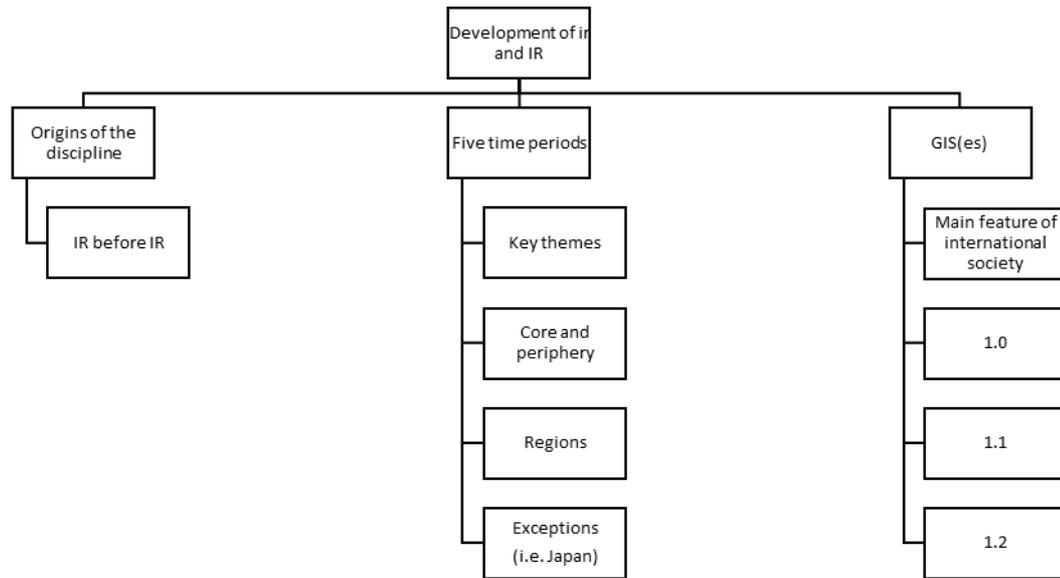


Figure 1. Structure of the Book – designed by the author.

In general, the book achieves its aim of linking ir with IR. From a global history perspective, they demonstrate the intrinsic Western-centrism in IR because of its institutionalization time and process. This approach allows for transcending Western-centrism and hearing the voices of non-Western scholars and societies. Achieving the main objective, Acharya and Buzan call for Global IR in the last chapter, which is the ultimate goal of the book reaching the practical world. They argue that it is time to struggle for Global IR, as the current ir is fertile for such a struggle (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 285). It is significant that Global IR does not mean an exclusive non-Western IR, rather inclusiveness of both Western and non-Western approaches without one dominating the other (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 298). Another notable contribution of the book is that it stands against the parochialism of any school, state, or nation, which is the current state of the IR discipline.

## 2.2. The Core–Periphery Problem

While the book represents significant efforts toward disciplinary pluralism by incorporating non-Western voices, it is not without constraints. First, the book structure prioritizes the West/the core. It accepts that the core-periphery structure is a Western construction (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, pp. 3–4), but pursues a similar structure in its analysis. The book organizes chapters sequentially, beginning with the core and concluding with the periphery (including its associated sub-regions and individual states). Yıldız calls this the “core-plus-periphery approach” (2022, p. 103), in which the core is still prominent. Although the aim was to demonstrate global history, the periphery remains peripheral even within the book, compared to the core and its detailed coverage. Acharya and Buzan attribute this shortcoming to a lack of available information (especially in English) from the periphery (2019, p. 1), which is a crucial and challenging gap to fill. Collaboration with local scholars is a significant requirement for addressing this issue and establishing a more inclusive Global IR.

## 2.3. The Language Question and Linguistic Hegemony

The second challenge is intertwined with the first: the exclusive focus on English. Acharya and Buzan state this on the first page: “There is very little literature or information on the origins and

evolution of IR outside the West in the English language” (2019, p. 1). Though it is significant to highlight this neglect, the decision to remain within a unilingual framework carries substantial analytical weight. It can unintentionally reinforce the hegemony of the core because of the requirement to write and publish in English. Aydinli and Aydinli mention this point: “Global IR cannot afford to be unilingual because a common language carries with it a homogenising impact that kills diversity and creativity” (2024, p. 961). Accordingly, scholars from the periphery might think that even a book on Global IR requires them to learn and use English in order to reach out with their voices. These circumstances indirectly impose barriers on such scholars, who are neither few in number nor lacking in quality (Aydinli & Aydinli, 2024, p. 943). This strain signals to local scholars that one’s ideas cannot circulate within the mainstream without English proficiency, regardless of the inherent value of the research. Similar to the first limitation, this linguistic boundary also suggests that the Global IR project requires deeper collaboration with local scholars.

#### 2.4. Universalism and the Gatekeeping Function of Global IR

The last and more crucial constraint is that non-Western contributions are evaluated based on their resonance within the Western IR community or the mainstream IR. If they are somehow able to get into the mainstream IR – such as Dependency Theory and Post-colonialism – they are valuable (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 257). If not, they are accused of being *provincialized*, meaning they are available only in local contexts and do not contribute to Global IR (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 258). Acharya and Buzan suggest that emerging GIS 1.2 expands the core with as non-Western powers diffuse and the periphery shrinks significantly (2019, p. 197). In other words, without being part of the core, the periphery still does not carry much ability to offer alternative approaches. Thus, “the key concern about any national school is whether it can ‘deprovincialise’ (Acharya, 2014c), that is, travel beyond the national or regional context from which it is derived in the first place” (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, p. 258). The same argument is replied in the book that “a key challenge for theories and theorists of Global IR is to develop concepts and approaches from Non-Western contexts on their own terms and apply them not only locally, but also to other contexts, including the larger global canvas” (Acharya & Buzan, 2019, pp. 302–303). Therefore, to be valuable and accepted as a member of Global IR, a theory should have global applicability or at least a broader applicability than its regional settings. This issue of applicability leads to a positivist inclination towards universalism, in which knowledge must be universal and applicable to all; otherwise, it is not scientific (Wallerstein, 1997, pp. 24–25). As such, global applicability refers to epistemological universalism, which stands against the very existence of non-Western IR approaches. This requirement causes an irresolvable aporia within Global IR that it aims to enlarge the mainstream IR through non-Western approaches, yet these approaches must have global applicability (epistemological universality) to be considered part of the mainstream IR. This demand is, in principle, almost impossible to satisfy: the very essence of non-Western IR lies in its critique of such universalist claims. To require them to become ‘universal’ - in the name of ‘global’ - means that they undergo epistemological erasure. Consequently, Global IR faces a paradox: it cannot integrate non-Western IR without simultaneously destroying the particularity that defines it.

Anderl and Witt (2020) underline the universalism problem by arguing that the quest for Global IR “reifies the idea of a truly universal body of knowledge” (2020, p. 32). As a result of this understanding, the gatekeeper role of Western-centric IR appears to have been inherited by Global IR, which has the power to decide whether a theory is valuable based on its broader epistemological applicability. Thus, it reinforces the practice of “de-legitimizing ‘particularity’ and re-legitimizing ‘globality’ as a quality for distinguishing between good and bad IR knowledge” (Anderl & Witt, 2020, p. 45). This inheritance issue is a significant problem that researchers should not ignore and is also challenging one to solve. It is critical to open the path for alternative theories to enter the IR discussion, while it is also crucial to prevent fragmentation or further parochialism of the discipline. Acharya and Buzan point this out by stating their reluctance to cause further

fragmentation of the discipline by including regional or local schools in the Global IR that lack broader applicability (2019, p. 258). It is a considerable challenge to achieve that balance while preserving the integrity of non-Western approaches.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, being one of the first steps towards a Global IR, the book contributes significantly to the IR discipline. Knowledge develops cumulatively, and taking the first step includes substantial hardships. Therefore, credit should be given to such an admirable effort in writing a book on the relation between ir and IR from a global history perspective. A considerable commitment and sustained focus are required to achieve this level of study. The shortcomings mentioned in this paper should be seen as areas for improvement for Global IR rather than as obstacles to it. Scholars striving for Global IR should address the aforementioned constraints in detail. The discipline must move toward institutionalizing pluralism without leading an unorganized mass of theoretical fragmentation. This balance requires a shift from 'integrating' the periphery into the core to a 'dialogue' between equals, regardless of geographic origin or English proficiency. Through this method, even if the tension between universalism and particularism persists to some extent, it does reach a more balanced equilibrium. The gatekeeper role should not be inherited from the Western-centric IR. Global IR Project must refrain from evaluating the value of a theory through its own criteria. It should allow non-Western approaches to retain their unique epistemological foundations by serving as a platform for diverse voices without eliminating any of them. The latter option should be decided on a case-by-case basis. This is something similar to choosing methodology and theory to understand a case rather than choosing a case to validate a certain methodology and theory. As a result, Global IR will be a platform for numerous voices, while the researchers will be the ones to choose among those alternatives to determine whether the non-Western approach works in the case being studied. Through this method, the field can achieve a synthesis that respects diversity without losing coherence. While the book opens the path towards Global IR, its structural and epistemic approach should be revised to reach a truly non-parochial Global IR.

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**Etik onam:** Bu çalışmada etik kurul onayı gerekli değildir.

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