Eurocentrism can be found in many aspects of international relations (IR) theory. Whilst it is not always a term used in reference to IR theory, Eurocentrism is broadly defined as a worldview which is centred around and favours Europe over the rest of the world. This paper will build on this rather broad definition and how it relates to IR theory, before discussing its implications. It will focus specifically on three IR theories; Marxism; Feminism; and, Postcolonialism. The former two have received criticism for their Eurocentric aspects which will be discussed, whilst Postcolonial theory works to identify and address issues of Eurocentrism and its historical suppression of non-western voices in IR theory.

To begin, this paper addresses the question of what Eurocentrism is in IR theory. As mentioned in the introduction, Eurocentrism places European and, more broadly, Western culture and values at the centre of discussions, generally at the expense of other cultures. Rather than focusing on the geographical definition of Europe which has changed throughout history, Eurocentrism is about the epistemological and cultural divide between Europe and the rest of the world, assuming that European civilisation has a unique historical advantage over other cultures (Xypolia, 2016). Eurocentric assumptions can be either conscious or subconscious, and either imperialist or anti-imperialist (Hobson, 2012), with their manifestation having changed over time.

The term Eurocentrism was first coined in the 1980s by Egyptian Marxist Samir Amin and drove the publication of his book Eurocentrism in 1989. Amin argues that the introduction of the capitalist system allowed Western cultures to develop more than non-western cultures, thus creating a model of reliance whereby the “others” require support from the West to survive. Therefore, the perpetual use of the capitalist structure continues to drive Eurocentrism as an ideological construct (Fourny, 1994). Generally, Eurocentrism can be used interchangeably with Western centrism, however the latter was not used by scholars until the 1990s. Western centrism places the US at the centre of the international system, however due to the historical ties between the US and Europe, separating the two can be difficult (Kuru, 2016).
The work of Kuru (2016), discusses how IR theory has recently undergone an 'anti-Eurocentric wave', however expresses concern that anti-Eurocentric scholars have a tendency to see Eurocentrism everywhere, without acknowledging the division between the impact of Eurocentrism on our understanding of the international system and having a Eurocentric worldview. Kuru presents three distinct variants of Eurocentrism in IR theory; historical-contextual (referred to as conjunctural); ideological; and residual. Over time, the dominant form of Eurocentrism has changed with the rise of the non-Western world and consequential decline in European dominance. Conjunctural Eurocentrism developed alongside the rise of Europe during the 19th century, as European nations were influential in the creation of world order during that time (Kuru, 2016). Conversely, ideological Eurocentrism is linked to Europe's position on the global stage and is not deterred by the rise of non-Western powers and decolonisation. Ideological Eurocentrism continues to drive the narrative of European states prevailing in a world which is shifting away from European hegemony. Finally, residual Eurocentrism is driven by individuals failing to recognise the problems raised by teaching and researching with a Eurocentric worldview. This can be due to scholarly generations, lack of access to up to date IR literature, or specifically studying a European dominated time period (Kuru, 2016). Residual Eurocentrism is considered by Kuru as the dominant form of Eurocentrism found today, however claims that the prevalence of Eurocentric IR is decreasing over time and the transition from conjunctural to ideological to residual indicates the transition towards the ending of Eurocentrism in IR altogether.

Conversely, Hobson (2012) argues that the presence of Eurocentrism in IR has not declined over time, but instead, has shifted in form. His book The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics provides the most comprehensive study of Eurocentrism in IR theory, arguing that Eurocentrism has been a consistent factor in influencing the discipline with only slight changes in its format. Hobson breaks down the definition of Orientalism presented by founding Postcolonial theorist Edward Said, stating that Eurocentrism can take either imperialist or anti-imperialist forms. Separating history into three time periods, Hobson presents two forms of Eurocentrism, manifest and subliminal, arguing that pre-1945 Eurocentrism was very overt and interconnected with scientific racism (Hobson, 2012). During this period, the structure of “first the West, then elsewhere” dominated, implying that Europe was the centre of development whereby its methods were diffused globally to become norms (Chakrabarty, 2000: 7). Post-1945, Eurocentrism in IR theory became more subliminal and scientific racism was removed from the discipline. Western-centric thought still remained in the discipline however, even if it was not as overt. For example, phrases such as ‘civilised vs. barbaric’ were replaced by ‘modern vs. traditional’, indicating a subtle shift in the terminology, however little change in the underlying meaning (Hobson, 2012). During this post-1945, pre-1989 period, a number of prominent IR theories were founded and thus have frequently received criticism for their Eurocentric biases, including Realism, the English School Theory and Neo-Marxism (Hobson, 2012). Finally, Hobson argues that post-1989, subliminal Eurocentrism was replaced by the revival of manifest Eurocentrism, whereby institutional Euro-
centrism once again dominated mainstream IR theory.

The creation of the Westphalian narrative, whereby the International System we know today was created through the Treaty of Westphalia in 1641, can be considered a Eurocentric approach to global history. Concepts that are today taken for granted, including sovereignty and secularism, are thought to have been founded in this agreement and spread globally through European colonialism. This interpretation of history is argued to be both Eurocentric and inaccurate, with scholars pointing out that sovereignty was unlikely to be conceptualised in Westphalia, as it appeared much later on in history (Osiander, 2001; Kayaoglu, 2010). Working on the assumption that Westphalia was the foundation of the modern international system continues to drive the narrative of the rest of the world waiting to be discovered and developed into fully fledged states by European powers (Kayaoglu, 2010). This is an example whereby residual Eurocentrism continues to permeate the lessons of IR theory, as through teaching students this interpretation of world history reinforces these Eurocentric concepts and drives its influence in IR theory (Kuru, 2016).

Another example of Eurocentrism in IR theory is the use of Modernisation theory when discussing development. Modernisation theory is inherently Eurocentric, as it assumes that the success of Europe and the West is superior and can be replicated by other countries, when in reality non-western states start at a disadvantage. This is often due to the presence of colonialism which both contributed to the rise of Western powers, whilst undermining the capabilities of newly independent countries to develop. In this sense, Eurocentrism goes beyond Ethnocentrism, whereby not only does European/Western culture portray that their own values and standards are superior, it does so at the expense of other cultures (Tipps, 1973).

Eurocentrism has been argued, especially by Postcolonial theorists, to underpin traditional IR theories including Realism and Liberalism. Realism holds its roots in the actions of great powers, generally based in Europe and the West, whereby their desire to gain power drives the international system. Due to Realism’s emphasis on how power influences IR, it often undermines actions and events occurring outside powerful countries. For example, the Cold War, which never amounted to armed conflict between the US and the Soviet Union, cannot be considered peaceful for many other countries. Alternatively, Liberalism’s placement of Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) at the heart of the international system can be interpreted as a form of Eurocentrism, as it can be argued that these organisations only serve to promote the interests of the more powerful states, thus overlooking the interests of developing countries (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006).

To begin the discussion of Marxism, I refer back to the first use of the term Euro-
centrism, presented by Marxist scholar Samir Amin, in reference to the capitalist mode of production. Marxist theory is founded in the works of German Philosopher Karl Marx and focuses on understanding social practices through which present day actors and frameworks are constructed (Rupert, 2013). Marxism looks beyond domestic relations and the constraints of territorial boundaries which preoccupy traditional IR theories such as Realism and Liberalism, focusing instead on how globalisation, the capitalist system, and conflict between societal classes are the primary sources of instability in the global system (Rupert, 2013). Unlike traditional IR theories, Marxism acknowledges people do not make decisions solely based on their current situation, instead decisions are made “under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx in Tucker, 1978: 595). This has important links with recognising how colonialism influences the capabilities and actions of actors today.

Within Marxist theory, the diffusion of the capitalist system globally and its continued use today drives a Eurocentric narrative. Marx believed the feudal mode of production, whereby society is based on exchanging land for service or labour, was a strictly European phenomenon and a step towards a capitalist society. Therefore the birth of the capitalist mode of production had to occur in Europe (Blaut, 1999). From this, the capitalist system and so-called civilised traits were spread via diffusion from the core (Europe) to the periphery (non-Europe). In return, the periphery states provide Europe with raw materials and labour, driving the capitalist system. The division between periphery and core is today paralleled with the division between developing and developed countries, driving the Eurocentric capitalist system whereby non-western states struggle to develop and are held hostage by their reliance on the West for investment (Ahiakpor, 1985).

Similar to Marxism, Feminism is an overarching term for a plurality of feminist theories, all of which have different historical interpretations and political objectivity. The overlapping principle which brings them together under Feminism is the focus on drawing attention to the plight of women and gender subordination in international politics and the global economy (Tikner and Sjoberg, 2013). Feminist theories re-evaluate the founding concepts of IR presented under traditional theories, including sovereignty, security and the state, and holds its roots in the ‘Third Great Debate’ in the 1980s. Western Feminism has received significant criticism from scholars for their interpretation of women in developing countries, which I present here as a form as Eurocentrism.

Western feminism specifically has received criticism for its portrayal of women in developing countries as a singular monolithic subject, with no consideration given to variations in class, culture, ethnicity or religion (Spivak, 1988). The term Western feminist is used by scholars to draw attention to the theory's characterisation of non-western women as 'other', thus defining themselves as Western.
The emphasis on the division between the West and the rest drives a Eurocentric narrative in its analysis, whereby Western women dominate and their ideologies are portrayed as that of all women (Hawthorne, 2007).

This form of Feminism has also been criticised for the white saviour narrative it presents, whereby women in developing nations are considered in need of saving from oppression, when in reality this is not the case. The work of Western Feminists to give agency to non-western women frequently fails, as taking a Western perspective of an issue can often undermine the actions of the very women they are trying to save (El Ouardi and Sandy, 2019). This white saviour narrative also drives the idea that Western women have more power and capabilities than their non-Western counterparts, driving a type of ideological Eurocentrism. Finally, the dominance of Western feminism above other strands of feminism can also be argued as a form of Eurocentrism, as it removes agency from other types of feminists and their interpretations of IR. For example, Postcolonial and Black Feminism do not just focus on the suppression of women by men, but shine light on the plight of women who have also been oppressed due to their race and social class (McEwan, 2003). Postcolonialism and Feminism frequently overlap in their interpretation of events, as both are interested in addressing the marginalisation of specific groups.

This leads into the final IR theory in this discussion; Postcolonialism. Drawing upon Marxism and Post-Constructuralism, Postcolonial theory is concerned with marginalised groups and their representation. It is therefore a direct critique on how Eurocentrism has influenced the development of the international system and present-day divisions between the West and non-West. Whilst the ‘post’ in Postcolonialism indicates that this is now an era after colonialism, postcolonial theory argues that colonialism continues to undermine the development of former colonies, influencing the way in which societies, governments and people experience the international system.

Postcolonial theory is considered to be founded on the work of Palestinian-American Edward Said in Orientalism (1976). His monograph argues that the concept of Orientalism, which refers to the study of the Orient (the East) instead of the analysis of the Occident (the West), is directly linked to European imperialism and thus can be described as a form of Eurocentrism. This definition of Orientalism is different to that presented by Hobson (2012) as discussed previously, as it identifies Orientalism as a concept directly related to imperialism/colonialism. Said argues that, under imperialism, the creation of the Orient was to counterbalance the Occident. The latter was considered to be rational, developed and superior and thus, as its opposite, the Orient was perceived as irrational, underdeveloped and inferior (Xypolia, 2016). The power imbalance and negative connotations of the East allowed for the reinforcement of the West as having commanding rule, driving an asymmetrical relationship between the two (El Ouardi and Sandy, 2019).
Postcolonial theorists argue that the international system is inherently constructed to benefit Western powers, with even the boundaries of post-colonial countries being drawn by colonialists to undermine the development of the newly independent states. This parallels with Marxist theory, where history influences the actions of those in the present. Postcolonial theorists also interpret actions and events through alternative lenses compared to other IR theorists. In the case of nuclear proliferation, developing countries have been presented as unable to be trusted with nuclear weapons due to their instability, violation of human rights norms and unpredictable nature. In the work of Postcolonial theorist Shampa Biswas (2014), the question is rephrased; shifting it from who can be trusted with nuclear weapons, to who determines who can be trusted, and why. Those recognised as nuclear-weapon states - the USA, Russia, UK, France and China, are those that decide who is allowed to possess these powerful weapons. Addressing this issue from the perspective of postcolonial theory flips the question onto those who make the decisions (the West) and how the suppression of nuclear programmes and the presentation of countries such as Iran and North Korea as ‘bad actors’ works to keep the West securely in power.

To conclude, this paper has given a broad overview of what Eurocentrism is and its relevance in IR theory. It has addressed the complexity of defining Eurocentrism in IR theory and given examples where Eurocentrism is present in scholar’s interpretations of the international system, including assumptions surrounding the Treaty of Westphalia and Modernisation Theory. The rise of anti-Eurocentric work and the identification of different forms of Eurocentrism has been a crucial step in addressing the epistemological Eurocentric bias present in aspects of IR theory. There does however continue to be a significant research bias, with the majority of IR research being published by scholars in elite institutes in America’s Northeast and Western Europe. Only 3% of IR research papers are from scholars in rising power states, including China, India and Brazil (Kristensen, 2015: 266). The lack of research being undertaken in developing nations indicates there is a long way to go in combating Eurocentrism in IR research.

Whilst Eurocentrism is found in the very foundations of many classical IR theories, it can also be found in more modern theories, including within Western Feminism and the capitalist system of Marxism. Only Postcolonial theory attempts to address the Eurocentric issues found in IR theory and reframe security issues in a way which removes the bias of Eurocentrism. Whilst we cannot ignore the presence of European powers in the history of IR theory, changes in teaching and research can help move towards an anti-Eurocentric IR.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


