
THE UTILITY OF THE POST-MODERN DECONSTRUCTION PROCESS IN THE REALM OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore and challenge widely held notions surrounding the utility of post-modernist deconstruction within the realm of the social sciences.

Beginning with a defence of the inclusion or rather by building a case for the inclusion of post-modernist modes of enquiry in the social sciences (specifically in this case; political science), this paper builds on the historical utility of the deconstruction process as well as mapping out its perceived utility in contemporary political theory as well as charting out its importance in the analysis of international relations and global affairs. Lastly, this paper also seeks to understand how the utilisation of Derridean deconstruction (often widely held to be the most important of all post-modernist modes of enquiry) in the creation of post-colonial and post-structuralist discourse possesses the potential to create bodies of knowledge that are not rooted in or wholly reliant on positivist logic or discourse, a characteristic that is inarguably important in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Deconstruction, post-modernism, political science, international relations theory, contemporary political theory, post-colonial discourse, feminist theory.

Introducing Post-Modernism in the field of Political Science

In the past, most political analysts have dismissed or cast aside the utility of post-modernism as a methodological approach or tool of analysis due to its perceived inherently self-contradictory nature.

Most analysts believe that this self-contradictory nature makes post-modernism incredibly irrelevant to the field of the social sciences.

While this insinuation that post-modernism when viewed through certain lenses seems more self-contradictory than self-aware may be somewhat justifiable, the assertion that post-modernism itself is wholly irrelevant towards inquiry in the social sciences is incredibly hard to substantiate.

Post-modernism's premier postulations were very concisely described by Terry Eagleton who viewed post-modernism as a "style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation." (Eagleton, 1996)

Post-modernism in essence must be viewed as a method of interrogation that is wholly suspicious of all discourse that attempts to propound ideas of objective truths that can fit under a grander metanarrative of order furthered by its postulations.

The subscription to Eagleton's view of post-modernism however must not be mistaken as an attempt to create or encourage the conceptualisation of an idea of a large and unified post-modern theoretical framework. Attempting to create a line of solidified post-modernist discourse would result in interrogative failure. This would also be counterproductive towards our efforts in attempting to introduce post-modernism and complexity theory (which shall be discussed later in this paper) within the field of International Relations.

The kind of post-modernism this paper is attempting to introduce into the field of International Relations is more of a method of interrogative reasoning as opposed to an entirely new larger theory or school of thought. This mode of reasoning must not find itself restricted to a mere theoretical approach that arose in opposition to the modernist line of thought in the contemporary era.

While post-modernism has enjoyed a fair amount of success within the fields of literary criticism, the assertion that post-modernism has caused considerable impact on the field of International Relations is inaccurate when the genealogy of International Relations is traced, the fact that post-modernism has made a very minor dent on political theory and political science (both of which can be viewed as the theoretical bases for the field of International Relations.) raises questions on the nature of the impact post-modernism has had on the field of International Relations.

Most political scientists and analysts have outrightly dismissed post-modernism despite the serious challenges it poses towards generally accepted theories in the field. This dismissal though, is not entirely baseless or unfounded.

Political scientists levy two major criticisms on the methodology of post-modernism's attempts to find utility within the fields of International Relations and Political Science.

The first is that the post-modern mode of scepticism can be utilised to legitimise political and social inaction.

Secondly, it has been argued that post-modernism as a school of thought and its disdain for metanarratives is in actuality a metanarrative by itself.

As Lyotard expresses, post-modernism is viewed by most political theorists as 'the metanarrative to end all metanarratives.'(Lyotard, 1984)By stressing upon the need to analyse context, post-modernism furthers a grand idea that 'context' is key to all analyses.Both of these grounds for dismissal however can be refuted through the utilisation of a contrasting (and arguably accurate) view of post-modernism.

Firstly, the idea that the sceptical mode of interrogative reasoning post-modernism utilises will result in the validation of political and social inaction exposes the largely inaccurate view political scientists have of post-modernism. By fearing that scepticism will result in inaction, political scientists unfairly assume that the end goal of post-modernism is to engage in relativism as opposed to uncovering differing perspectives.

Furthermore, it must be noted that post-modernism when viewed as a school of thought does not engage in propounding methodology that will result in change. The scepticism that post-modernism encourages is a mode of inquiry that is expected to uncover unknown differing perspectives. As with all other modes of inquiry, it is expected to uncover phenomena that can then be used to validate either action or inaction. Post-modernism does not call upon individuals to not act due to differing perspectives, it asks the individual to consider all perspectives before acting and in order to understand the best possible course of action.

The problem of post-modernism being utilised to justify inaction is therefore a problem with the individual interpretation of post-modernism and not the method of inquiry itself. Academia does not blame the existence of realism for war and hence it is inaccurate and logically flawed to state that inaction is driven by post-modern postulations.

Secondly, the opinion that by rejecting metanarratives, post-modernism is furthering an entirely new meta-narrative reliant on the importance of 'context' is also somewhat flawed as it attempts to view a method of interrogation as only an entirely independent school of thought.

Post-modernism cannot be seen as only a line of discourse or only a school of thought. However, more than anything else it can be seen as a mode of interrogation. As a mode of interrogative reasoning, it classifies 'context' as one of the multiple variables that should be accounted for when attempting to build a 'critique' of an event or situation. There is no objective reliance on the abstract concept of 'context' (or any other variable for that matter.)

There is only a focus on the fact that multiple variables impact systems.

The contributions that post-modernism has made to political science by way of it questioning generally accepted conceptualisations of progress as well as by attacking the philosophical position that is occupied by traditional political scientists and analysts results in what can perhaps be seen as post-modernism's most important contribution towards the field; the critique of positivism.

Post-modernism's critique of positivism directly attacks political science's overt focus on the observable "empirical" serving as the basis for the abstract "normative" as well as their implicit reliance on positivism.

The Anti-Positivism of Post-Modernism

Most political scientists do not explicitly call themselves positivists, however, they often rely upon certain positivist tenets especially the concept that "experience" (verifiable) serves as the base for "knowledge" (abstract) and that it is possible to reflect upon situations unfolding objectively without having to rely upon philosophical (sometimes theoretical) assumptions. (Tucker, 1998)

This reliance on positivism, however implicit it may be results in an analytical attitude that believes the methodology of research utilised by the hard sciences can be directly utilised by the social sciences. A base examination of the empirical method helps us infer that it cannot be wholly utilised by the social sciences. If an attempt is made, the risk of reductionism looms over the inquiry.

Objectivity in the social sciences is therefore impossible but a commitment towards objectivity is still claimed within classical approaches due to a misplaced urge to utilise empiricism as it has been wrongly theorised that empirical data is the sole marker of objective validity.

In order to understand the 'anti-positivism' of post-modernism one must attempt to first understand the post-modernist deconstruction of discourse and the process through which it occurs. Deconstruction in essence is a mode of philosophical and literary interrogation derived from the works of Derrida. Deconstruction strays away from the traditional reliance on positivist tenets where observable data is used to theorise abstract conceptualisations. This anti-positivist stance is important within the social sciences as it has been observed time and again that the social realm cannot be studied with the methods of investigation employed within the natural sciences. Investigation within the social sciences requires a completely different epistemology.

Theories of post-positivism and positivism are often incredibly general and unsuitable to investigate the complexities of human interaction. Objectivity is near impossible within the social sciences as humans investigating human behaviour cannot do so in an objective manner or without the imposition of some kind of moral codes or value systems. Thus, instead of seeking objective results, one must attempt to account for context and meaning within the subjective experiences of humans engaging in social interaction.

Deconstruction seeks to investigate the cores of texts found within the literary and philosophical tradition in order to contest perceived or generally accepted binaries 'allegedly' present in them. The term 'allegedly' is used here as it is impossible to ascertain whether the perceived existence of these binaries is a result of authorial intent or interpretation. Unlike Barthes' postulation, in contemporary times, one may assume that the author dies multiple deaths much before they are truly dead due to the existence of a vast array of interpretations that can exist and are conceptualised based on the subjective utilisation of language.

In order to understand the reasons for the existence of these binaries, the genealogical roots of the language and other variables that are employed in the creation of them must be investigated not in order to trace the roots of a variable but rather in order to investigate the complex and constantly evolving relationship between the multiple variables that impact the existence of these binaries or conceptualisations. Language is often seen as something that influences power dynamics and considering the role of power dynamics in knowledge formation, it is pertinent to understand the manner by which language impacts these variables. The language that creates these binaries is deconstructed through an analysis of the social constructions upon which the texts examined and the language employed rest upon. Deconstruction in the purest sense can be seen as a re-examination of literature and interpretation systems in order to pick out hollow binary oppositions that have influenced the generally accepted understandings of them. Once these binaries are picked out, an attempt is made to engage in the analysis of the context that influences the creation of these binaries. By understanding contexts that influence the theoretical bases for interpretation and the language employed in the interpretation not only helps identify said binaries but also aids in theorising why these binaries are (contextually) flawed or problematic. Often it is not the binary itself that is problematic but the system that enables the creation of these binaries. Deconstruction is essentially a method through which meaning is broken down or problematized in order to assess the degree of arbitrariness that is involved in the ascription of meaning. In the realm of political science and International Relations however, the application of deconstruction must be manifold in order to prevent stagnation at the first stage. Political philosophers historically have been somewhat suspicious of the value of deconstruction in the fields of IR and Political Science.

Deconstruction has inaccurately been viewed as an approach that does nothing more than encourage the problematization of theoretical concepts and traditional positions by contrasting them to a constantly evolving ideal of 'modern sensibility and context.'

It is argued that this method of deconstruction will lead to nothing but a reliance on relativism. However, this criticism is entirely flawed if not wholly inaccurate as it once again views deconstruction as only a genealogical methodological approach.

This is not the case.

Through employing deconstruction, we do not seek to only draw out a perceived 'root' and trace its origin and, relationship with contemporary forms. We seek to understand why these roots exist and how they influence the creation of contemporary forms. There is no guarantee that these roots will be immediately or overtly observable either and it must be understood that their influence on contemporary forms constantly evolves. This constantly evolving nature of the form continually influences our interactions with it thereby resulting in a constantly evolving interaction process dependent on interconnected multivariate relationships.

For a decision to be made regarding our interaction with a form, an element of undecidability must exist. Once a decision is made, the undecidability does not disappear. Decision and undecidability that governs our interactions with forms exist in a loop that is constantly evolving and impacting multiple interactions. The criticism of alleged relativism also falls short when it is understood that deconstruction is not a form of critique building or critique itself.

In general discourse, building a 'critique' implies creating a set of conceptual distinctions that are rooted in allegedly constant and consistently verifiable knowledge systems. Through the application of deconstruction as an interrogative approach under the over-arching post-modern interrogation process, we do not attempt to create a concrete conceptual critique of political and international relations theory but rather a constantly evolving critique of the 'objective' realities that political science and theory attempts to propound.

Therefore, the view that is generally held of what a 'critique' is finds no place for itself within post-modernist deconstruction discourse. The constantly evolving nature of the 'critique' that post-modernism builds leads to an understanding that is centred around the perceived fluidity of the variables that influence the formulation of this 'critique.'

Through the employment of the Derridean tool of deconstruction in International Relations, we are attempting to reject metaphysical understandings of history and global situations primarily due to their reliance on the creation and existence of hierarchies and dichotomies that have survived to this day from their conceptualisation and result in the creation of the foundation upon

which all of the language of International Relations rests on. By rejecting binaries, we are not only rejecting simple dual relationships between multiple variables, we are rather seeking to reject the structure that allows for the existence of these binaries. We are not attempting to reject only binaries; we are attempting to reject the structural creation of binaries.

The Utility of Deconstruction in International Relations and the need for Philosophical Integration

Considering the changing dimensions of international politics since the dawn of the 21st century, there is vital importance for the inclusion of subjective ethical and moral values in our analysis of global events. While it is categorically impossible to create an overarching metanarrative about the necessity of objective norms and values for the sake of analysis, there is a need for some degree of global normative consensus.

Through the utilisation of deconstruction as a method, it can be inferred that the idea of what constitutes a ‘human’ has been challenged if not questioned. Considering how the ‘human’ is supposed to be the agent of disbursing values and norms, International Relations must not confine its research on these topics and their impact on the field within itself; rather it must face the challenges deconstruction poses and attempt to integrate its approach with that of the methodology proposed by the philosophical discourse surrounding deconstruction.

Commitment towards analysing the importance and role of values in International Relations is not an entirely contemporary or modern phenomenon. Most prominent figures among International Relations theorists have always held a rather hybrid view of world politics in which a nexus between power and values was always highlighted (albeit not entirely overtly.)

Martin Wight, one of the founders of the so-called “English School”, witnessed and extensively wrote about a “third current in the tradition of the political theory of international relations, separate but interwoven with realism and idealism/utopianism” which he called “rationalism” characterized by the belief that international actors should be reasonable enough to be able to coexist and cooperate even in the anarchic absence of the governing sovereign, by seeking lesser evil, acting with enlightened self-interest and relying on justified power.(Hall, 2006)

The emphasis researchers place on values in contemporary world politics, however, may have gone too far in recent years.

The “constructivist” tradition propounded by theorists such as Alexander Wendt have employed a fair degree of extravagance in their emphasis on the roles played by ideas in international relations; according to Wendt, constructivism is holistic “structural idealism”: “social life is

‘ideas all the way down ... deep, unobservable [cultural] structures constitute agents and rules of interaction.’(Wendt, 1992)

Stephen Krasner cautions that, while norms definitely do matter, in a largely fluid environment driven by power asymmetries, multiple, often conflicting norms and no strong conflict-resolving authority, actors “can select among strategies that deploy normative as well as material resources in different and sometimes original ways.” (Krasner, 1984)

The “actors” that Krasner refers to here are the rulers of states, who are the base variables of analysis in the realm of International Relations (according to Krasner). However, it can be inferred that these conditions apply to other actors within a system as well.

An examination of the postulations of the Constructivist School, however, results in the exposition of a specific metanarrative that it has created when an understanding of what influences global events is brought into question. Constructivists, in their attempts to stray from the overtly positivist tradition of the Realists have reduced all situations unfolding globally to things that can be attributed to the varying ideals that subjective norms possess and their subsequent influence on the actions of various actors within the system. to the reality of power or the ideal of norms.

An analysis of the debates in International Relations between Liberalism and Realism results in the exposure of a rather vulgar distinction between the two schools. The postulation that Realism, which prescribes minimizations of inescapable power conflicts among actors pursuing their own interests, does not at all find any place for the postulations of liberalism, which preach the practicality of norms and the possibility of cooperation is not only categorically untrue but also incredibly arbitrary. It is impossible for rationality to disengage itself from norms and conversely, norms cannot be sustained without rationality.

“Self, roles and reasons cannot be disentangled.”(Wendt, 1992)

One of the greatest challenges deconstruction as a mode of analysis poses towards International Relations is the challenge posed to the conceptualisation of the “human,” which is essentially supposed to be that which after the State is modelled.

Through the application of deconstruction, the idea of the “human” can no longer be considered a given, especially after various philosophical developments in the last century.

Since the dawn of modernity and since the Enlightenment era, humans have historically compensated for the upheaval of religious certainties by establishing themselves as the foundations or bases of epistemological, ontological, and ethical arguments and truths.

However, through the application of deconstruction as a method, this postulation now finds itself resting upon shaky ground.

The deconstruction of the concept of a “human” has posed serious challenges towards exercises in IR that are centred around this very conceptualisation of a “human” as well as analyses dependent on the interactions impacted by the “human” and entities that are comprised of “humans.”

Such difficulties in analyses that are dependent on the conceptualisation are materialised by the challenges “postmodern” enquiries of approaches towards International Relations pose. No matter what amount of ethical and normative objectivity other approaches claim to possess, upon examination it is observed that they are all engaging in some form of cultural relativism.

The problem of relativism is something that post-modern approaches must tackle instead of avoiding or enabling. This however can be done only by engaging with this problem on a philosophical level and by also restructuring IR’s understanding of deconstruction as the current understanding does not possess sufficient philosophical backing.

Deconstruction can be viewed as a philosophical approach towards theory that is severely iconoclastic and anti-foundationalist.

Epistemologically, deconstruction requires the outright abandonment of the illusion of absolute and universal certainty of knowledge that is obtainable through the human mind or agency through a gradually shifted withdrawal from a theoretical reliance on the perceived absolute.

Humans can only possess a kind of “knowledge” that is always fallible and more precisely comprises mere contingent assumptions that have been gathered from and are based on a limited number of experiences, observations, evidence, or data and interpreted from particular subjective perspectives; the existence of a knowledge system that possesses complete objective truths and realities is impossible.

Through the application of deconstruction, it would serve IR well to view any human “knowledge”, as something that implies a “fallible but probable assumption”, “knowledge” along with human reason and rationality (that propose and examine such “knowledge”) must always remain potential objects of re-examination and possible refutation.

Contemporary Debates around Deconstruction

Deconstruction as an approach is not exclusive only to post-modernism; as a method of inquiry, deconstruction seeks to engage with all theoretical approaches towards international relations. More than a methodology it is a tool of inquiry. As a tool of inquiry, deconstruction has managed

to create several fruitful debates surrounding the structural bases that approaches toward international relations comprise; the most productive of these conversations have been with those schools of thought that are closest in history and orientation to deconstruction. At the same time, the issues raised in those debates are often similar to those raised by more strident critics completely opposed to the deconstructive enterprise.

Hans-Georg Gadamer in 1981 spoke of ‘Deconstruction’ as an entirely negative exercise. Gadamer through his utilisation of hermeneutics speaks of deconstruction as a “repudiation” of the “language of concepts” that is the legacy of European philosophy. As already noted, however, deconstruction is always a question and a double movement aware of its reliance on the texts it deconstructs and hence not a repudiation. The second charge is that deconstruction does not allow for the possibility of a word being redefined or used independently of its traditional metaphysical meaning. Gadamer when considering the Derridean inclusion of the terms “understanding” in general, “self-understanding” and “dialectic,” in the metaphysical realm fails to understand why they are included when used in the way he uses them. This argument is weakened, however, by Gadamer’s own reference to “an older wisdom that speaks in living language.” (Diane P. Michelfelder, 1989)

The Feminist criticism of deconstruction shares many similarities with the criticisms levied upon deconstruction by most political theorists, nonetheless, some exchanges published in the early 1990s in ‘Feminist Contentions’ were more specific in their claims that deconstruction validated political inaction. Seyla Benhabib, for instance, acknowledges that subjectivity is largely shaped by the relationship between language and other symbolic structures, but insists that there must remain some sense in which we view ourselves as both “authors and characters” in our own life histories. She argues that, in order to be politically effective in the face of women’s sometimes fluid sense of self and lack of autonomy, feminist philosophy requires a core of irreducible selfhood and agency that deconstruction would possibly wind up denying. As Judith Butler points out however, this line of argument precludes the possibility of any “*political* opposition” to the self as traditionally understood because it allows us no political way to move beyond the traditional metaphysical binaries. (Seyla Benhabib, 2017)

In her response to Butler, Benhabib emphasizes another recurring theme in debates about deconstruction: “how can one be constituted by discourse without being determined by it?” That is, how does the deconstructive understanding of the self as opaque and internally divided provide a starting point for social and political critique? This line of thought however is rooted in an inaccurate view of deconstruction as Benhabib seems to believe that deconstruction prioritises discourse in its inquiry. Conversely, however, we have seen that for deconstruction discourse is neither static nor uncontested, which means that it is impossible for it to be fully determinative of the self, either. The very lack of a permanent, substantial self in the usual sense that Benhabib

and others criticize in deconstruction, is at the same time, what enables the existence or the possibility of the existence of agency outside and beyond the world of fixed essences and meanings envisioned by the philosophical tradition. (A Cartesian self, Descartes himself tells us in the *Meditations*, is most free when it has no choice but to follow Reason.) The complexities here can be seen in the way deconstructive texts themselves often grapple with these same questions about the possibility of personal and political agency but, as might be expected, come up with no final answer. (Seyla Benhabib, 2017)

Similar issues were raised in the 1993 debate between deconstruction and Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatism. Rorty accused Derrida of being a humanist in the Enlightenment sense, while claiming that deconstruction itself diverts attention away from real politics (which he later defines as "a matter of pragmatic, short-term reforms and compromises"). He supports the deconstructive understanding of language, which he compares to Ludwig Wittgenstein's, but he denies that the consequences of a Wittgensteinian theory of language can be meaningfully applied to the natural sciences. He instead argues for an empiricist and naturalist position in science, which he sees as in conflict with deconstruction's "transcendental" side, that is, its continuing concern with metaphysics and cosmology. (Fabbri, 2008)

In response, Derrida acknowledges some similarities between pragmatism and deconstruction, but defends the transcendental question and refusal to abandon metaphysics entirely as a defence against "empiricism, positivism, and psychologism." He also mentions his work on the inevitability of violence in politics, which contradicts Rorty's political optimism. According to Derrida, the political state is founded on the rule of law, and the rule of law, in turn, is founded on the power to punish, that is, on violence, which is thus the foundation of the political state. His later work on immigration emphasises the political state's reliance on a sharp and often violent boundary between who has full rights and who does not have full rights over democratic citizenship. (Fabbri, 2008)

Philosophy in a Time of Terror (2003) is not a direct confrontation between deconstruction and Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action, but it does illustrate the continuity of themes among those critical of deconstruction over the preceding twenty years. In the context of 9/11, Habermas' remarks acknowledge the structural violence that underlies the successful societies of what he terms the West. But then questions the "deconstructivist suspicion," that the model of communication that works reasonably well in everyday situations, will no longer be adequate when we move to larger conversations between political and social groups. He argues that insisting dialogue is "nothing but" displaced violence obscures the potential of dialogue for ending violence without creating new pretexts for it. He similarly objects to the deconstruction of the concept of tolerance as always, an exercise of the power to tolerate or not, because the toleration demanded in a democracy is one between equals and thus mutual rather than

paternalistic. He also finds a certain circularity in deconstruction, since it seems to rely on the same universalism, tolerance, and other variables that it seeks to undo an implicit reliance on. (Fabbri, 2008) (Jürgen Habermas, 2003)

As already noted, however, this double gesture is itself the essence of deconstruction. Derrida, for his part, points out that the “major events” that provoke the kind of communication between groups Habermas refers to are more often, if not exclusively, those that directly affect Europe and the United States and not, for instance, an equal number of deaths in Somalia or the Sudan. What is threatened by 9/11, he goes on, is exactly a particular context of interpretation that has dominated the dialogues between “the West” and its Other, legitimating some forms of violence while disallowing others. He reasserts his reading of toleration as an exercise of paternalistic, or specifically religious, power. One does not ask an oppressed group to “tolerate” their oppressors; it is something asked only of those in a position to grant or deny such toleration. He also questions the possibility of an actually existing democracy, due to the violence of power relations, much less the possibility of a democracy in which different groups would be sufficiently equal for toleration to be genuinely mutual. (Jürgen Habermas, 2003)

This last contestation between Habermas and Derrida, is indirect because it was in the form of separate interviews, illustrates three main points. One, already noted, is the continuity of objections to deconstruction over an extended period of time, primarily focused around issues of the everyday vs. the transcendental (a dualism that deconstruction seeks to undermine) and the political implications of deconstruction. The second is the lingering impression that these confrontations rely more on contradiction than on real attempts at communication, or even argument. A method that questions everything, including itself and even the concept of method, as deconstruction does, leaves critics little concrete substance to criticize, except the circularity and the double gesture that deconstruction embraces. At the same time, the third point to be noted is the increasing engagement of deconstruction with politics after 1989, if not directly in response to these challenges, at least in the context of their persistence. (Jürgen Habermas, 2003)

Derrida makes a series of statements about the nature of deconstruction in the 2001 interview about 9/11 that suggest both similarities and differences from his earlier pronouncements. He defines a deconstructive philosopher as "someone who analyses and then draws the practical and effective consequences of the relationship between our philosophical heritage and the structure of the still dominant juridico-political system, which is clearly undergoing mutation." The explicit emphasis on politics and pragmatics is as noticeable as the much more obscure references that were more common thirty years ago. Simultaneously, he emphatically repeats the double gesture of affirming his faith in and allegiance to the idea of an international law that, like democracy, is unattainable and, once again, like democracy, undecidable, that is, impossible even to envision without contradiction. Finally, he returns to "Plato's Pharmacy" to argue that,

like writing for Socrates, the political state is "at once remedy and poison," something we cannot live with because of its inherent violence, nor without because only the state can protect us from the violence it engenders. (Jürgen Habermas, 2003) (Fabbri, 2008)

Feminist Deconstruction

Upon examination of Feminist Theory and the process of deconstruction, an implicit nexus is highly observable. The process of engaging in a re-reading of European history by Feminist scholars can be seen as something that is implicitly deconstructive in nature. Although implicit in Derrida's work since "Plato's Pharmacy" (1972), this deconstructive process when re-examining European history was made explicit and largely observable in a 1981 interview with Christie V. McDonald called "Choreographies."

Much earlier, however, multiple feminist theorists in France were utilising the strategy of deconstruction in their work.

In their 1975 book *The Newly Born Woman*, for instance, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément highlight the series of hierarchical binary oppositions (good/bad, life/death, day/night, culture/nature, male/female) that provide most, if not all, of the key terms that open a text to deconstructive reading. The list, which carries a footnoted reference to Derrida, is not, a passing or innocuous one. (Hélène Cixous, 1986)

In Plato the pair speech/writing is one central theme; in the ancient Greeks generally, active/passive; in religion God/man, later Christian/Jew; in René Descartes and the moderns mind/body; in colonial or racist ideology Western/Oriental, white/black.

Cixous and Clément's move, in a further repetition of Derrida's method, is not to reverse these hierarchies or the manner in which the variables are privileged as this is a process which would only create another system of power. (Hélène Cixous, 1986)

They prefer to think in what they term is a "third" way. This third option is referred to as "bisexuality" in this context, and it refers to the refusal to focus on a single sexual organ in favour of undifferentiated pleasures of the flesh. This move to rethink sexuality as part of a deconstructive strategy, drawing on psychoanalytic and anthropological texts such as Marcel Mauss' "Essay on the Gift," is a common theme in French feminist deconstruction, also found in the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, for example (and in later texts by Derrida himself). (Hélène Cixous, 1986)

Genevieve Lloyd undertakes a larger historical feminist reading in *The Man of Reason* (1984), deconstructing (though she does not use that term) major philosophical texts from Plato to

Simone de Beauvoir along a fault line that would equate reason with the masculine. The hierarchical dualism found in deconstruction (speech/writing, male/female, and so on.) takes the form rational/irrational, knowledge/ignorance, and so on. Lloyd follows the evolution of the concept of Reason through the history of European philosophy. After 1600, public/private and universal/particular were politically significant additions to the list; in the twentieth century, existentialism added transcendence/embodiment. (Lloyd, 2002)

The underlying pair superior/inferior has been most important, according to Lloyd. As we have already seen, whatever is on the masculine side of the dichotomy is assumed to have value; whatever is on the feminine side is assumed to have none. Lloyd, like Derrida, Cixous, and Clément, rejects reversing this polarity because it "would ironically occur in a space already prepared for it by the intellectual tradition it seeks to reject." Lloyd concludes with her own version of the deconstructive double gesture, perhaps more optimistic than her French counterparts: "Philosophy has defined ideals of Reason through exclusions of the feminine." However, it also contains resources for critical reflection on those ideals and its own aspirations.(Lloyd, 2002)

Post-Colonialism and the limitations of the deconstructive process (a conclusion?)

Postcolonialism studies how societies, governments, and peoples in formerly colonised parts of the world interact with the rest of the world. Post-colonialism as a field of study employs a method of inquiry nearly identical to deconstruction by attempting to analyse the effects of colonialism on modern society in formerly colonised territories.

This analysis aims to show the continuing influence of colonial and imperial history in creating a colonial frame of reference for the world as well as how Western forms of power and knowledge marginalise or exclude the non-Western world.

In addition to highlighting societal problems, the deconstruction of post-colonialism is interested in examining the differences in the global distribution of wealth and power as well as the reasons why some states and groups have such sway over others. By posing questions like these, postcolonialism's deconstructive process challenges other IR theories and creates space for alternative historical interpretations as well as perspectives on current events and problems.

Postcolonial deconstruction has specifically drawn attention to most of IR theory's neglect of the critical intersections of empire, race/ethnicity, gender, and class (among other factors) in the workings of the global power systems and hierarchies.

This hierarchy is focused on the consolidation of power rather than trying to achieve a more equitable distribution of power across peoples and governments. Postcolonialism's central thesis

is that European colonialism and imperialism left behind effects that still affect how the West views non-Western cultures. Non-Western states and peoples were constructed as "other" or "different" from the West in discourses, which are primarily written or spoken things, typically in a way that made them seem inferior.

This understanding of the symbolism of the connection between discourse and perception further helps in the utilisation of deconstruction in the postcolonial analytical process.

We might think about the discourses that make particular power relations seem natural or even inevitable in order to better comprehend postcolonialism. Important topics in international relations are seen by postcolonialism as making up discourses of power. This idea of a discourse enables academics to think about the world and its issues from a perspective that is not limited to the empirically verifiable and 'fact'-based research that underpins traditional IR theories like realism and liberalism. Furthermore, the utilisation of a deconstructive process of inquiry is enabled when a line of discourse is identified and the underpinning multivariate relationship that influences the creation of said discourse is analysed through deconstruction.

Within the example of a post-colonial discourse, attempts to interrogate and destroy the centre invariably causes the production of another centre.

"The entire history of the concept of structure," Derrida argues, "...must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre." (Smith-Laing, 2018)

One consequence of deconstruction in the context of post-colonialism, then, is that a deconstructive analysis believes that criticism of a given system is limited in the sense that it is always reliant on (and complicit with) the prevailing terms of the system it is attempting to deconstruct.

Deconstruction's suggestion of the critic's complicity with dominant social formations has materialised in the decades following Derrida's work into the pedagogical responsibilities of colonial, postcolonial, and transnational cultural studies of imperialism and the struggle for decolonization.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a leading postcolonial theorist, in the past has utilised the exercise of deconstruction to problematize and analyse the privileged, academic postcolonial critic's unknowing participation in the exploitation of the Third World. (Abdalkafor, 2015)

In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida utilises the term "differance," punning upon both spatial and temporal meanings of the verb "differer"--to "differ" and to "defer." The ambiguities between

these two meanings become meaningful only on the written page; as Derrida notes, in spoken French "differance" (with an "a") and "difference" (with an "e") are indistinguishable. In other words, since "differance" inheres only in writing and not in speech, Derrida's deconstructive project seeks to reverse the metaphysical presumption that speech (an indicator of presence or being) precedes the written word that approximates it. In "Signature Even Context"--a paper that invited a rather inaccurate and poorly drafted reply by critic John Searle and, in turn, Derrida's subsequent counter-response, Derrida deconstructs the binary opposition of speech/writing and argues that writing precedes speech rather than being its consequence or effect. Here arises one of the central principles of deconstruction. Derrida examines a hierarchical binary opposition (in this example, speech/writing) in which one term is privileged over the other. Derrida reverses the binary opposition by re-privileging writing, but with the important caveat that this inversion is itself unstable and susceptible to continual displacement. In terms of logocentrism, to privilege writing over speech is to characterize writing as a new "centre" of meaning. Spivak, again, points toward deconstruction's limitations in conceptualizing and sustaining an engagement with the politics of domination. Since deconstruction involves the infinite displacement of hierarchical binary oppositions (rather than their tacit reversal), the postcolonial critic aiming at substantive social transformation or revolution finds herself with inadequate power to revise dominant power structures. (Smith-Laing, 2018).

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