Transnational Terrorism and International Relations: Exploring Postcolonial Interventions in the Case of Boko Haram

Johannes Korak[51]
University of Vienna, Email: jokorak@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper reproduces a Postcolonial critique of mainstream International Relations-theory by emphasising the ontological and epistemological fallacies, as well as historical omissions that guard it's Eurocentric and racist ontology. With this critique in mind, a rough illustration of the complex situation in Nigeria, concerning Boko Haram, follows that highlights the group's violent turn, socio-economic structures conducive to the recruitment of humans, and transnational discursive interferences. Being aware of the intrinsic connection between culture and imperialism, articulated by Edward Said, the present article posits that mainstream International Relations-theory is not apt to analyse representations of power, crisis that are transnational in character or involve violent non-state actors.

Key Words
Boko Haram, Eurocentrism, Imperialism, International Relations, Postcolonialism, Transnationalism

[51] Regarding my own positionality, I consider it as immensely important to portend to the white privileges of global reach that reproduce, as epitome of power, the cartesian-capitalistic-Western-white-heteronormative-male as normative ideal, and which also made possible the following lines. Therefore this paper seeks to engage epistemologically and methodologically in what Mignolo (2000: 67) coined as "border thinking" or "an other thinking", being critical of various forms of knowledge and seeking to work "toward the audibility of the voices of […] Others" (Beier 2005:36).

Originally published in Volume 29 (March 2016), pp. 107–123. Corrected November 2026: volume and issue numbering.
https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.29.6

Introduction

Admittedly, the title of this paper may lead to the hasty conclusion that the following lines are concerned with a thorough case-study of the non-state group Boko Haram in Nigeria. Albeit, the latter will partially be scrutinised further, the present paper primarily discusses various failures of mainstream International Relations[52]-theory (thereafter mainstream-IR) when scrutinised from a Postcolonial perspective and furthermore, when trying to grapple with the occurrence of transnational non-state actors. Hence, the following pages are not interested in performing an inherently contradictory melodrama, as an enactment of Postcolonialism within the realm of mainstream IR would draw to a close, but intend to inquire what elements constitute a viable critique of the former aimed at the latter. Indeed, literature on the relationship between the two disciplines has been scarce and temporally fragmented over several years, therefore only nonsensical statements would argue that the small concessions to Postcolonialism within main textbooks of IR (cf. Baylis et al 2008[1997]: 994sqq.) resemble an adequate acknowledgment. Accordingly, this paper intents to contribute to this hitherto limited discourse and asks further, to what extent a Postcolonial excursion into the complex situation in Nigeria, regarding Boko Haram, can enrich a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon, coincidentally revealing the analytical failures of mainstream IR. Methodologically speaking, the present article relies upon a literary discussion.

The first part of this paper will outline the Postcolonial critique arguing against mainstream IR, by focusing on the *interdependent*[53] ontological and epistemological fallacies, as well as historical omissions, which in concert forearm the discipline's Eurocentric and racist assumptions. Alongside these protruding elements, an additional emphasis pertains to the significance of cultural representations that is unambiguously connected to the exercise of knowledge and power, as Said (2003 [1978]: 5) trenchantly put it "that ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied". This outlook will assist the subsequent sections, when illustrating the transnational ramifications pertaining to Boko Haram.

After engaging in Postcolonial criticism analogous to mainstream IR, the present paper directs the attention towards its second part and the following, though only fragmentary, illustration that focuses on Boko Haram. Approaching this issue, influenced by the virtues of Postcolonialism, this section highlights the transnational and complex character of the circumstances. By seizing upon the power-effect of cultural representation, advanced by Said, transnational discursive practices are also part of the analysis.

The third, and concluding, section of the present paper summarises the Postcolonial critique towards mainstream IR and the inferences emerging out of the illustration regarding Boko Haram. Hence, by putting the theoretical critique in conversation with empirical implications, this treatise

[52] Mainstream International Relations-theory is here defined as most notably the school of (Neo-)Realism, the discipline is based on and which is still, often uncritically, taught in introductory lectures to International Politics. Being aware of the already multiple existing critiques from various perspectives, this paper draws upon elements of *inter alia* constructivism-IR, post-modernism or post-structuralism.

[53] At this point it is important to note that none of the sub-sections of the Postcolonial critique concerning mainstream IR can be read separately. They are unequivocally interdependent and connected to each other.

argues concisely that through mainstream IR's massive ontological and epistemological inadequacies, the discipline is not able to theoretically analyse transnational phenomena and therefore deduces to refrain from applying the devices of this discipline to construe international occurrences, as it obscures structures that profit the powerful.

Postcolonialism vs. Mainstream IR: Interdependent Fallacies, Omissions and Assumptions

When putting Postcolonialism in dialogue with mainstream IR, Said's arguments in the Introduction to *Orientalism* cannot be disregarded. By employing Gramsci's notion of hegemony, he*[54] (ibid.: 6sq.) exemplifies that culture takes up, in concert with other knowledge-related aspects, an integral role when establishing political power and Orientalism, as an all-encompassing discourse, is not just an insubstantial story about the Orient, but imbues various forms of knowledge production which concomitantly work with a neat placement of power that repetitively puts "the Westerner" in the executive position over the Other - irrespective of changes in contexts. Culture as a hegemonic project, influenced heavily by imperialism, is therefore also central to the production of knowledge, while possible inherent hindrances do not act as obstacles to individuals engaged in intellectual work, but on the contrary, reveal themselves as fecund grounds, as Said (ibid: 14) argues further. In addition, the stark interdependence between imperialism and culture, as a hegemonic discourse, is emphasised more intensively by the Palestinian-US-American scholar in consonant with one of his* later writings *Culture and Imperialism*, when neatly summarising that:

> [n]either imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* [italics in original] and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like "inferior" or "subject races", "subordinate peoples", "dependency", "expansion", and "authority". Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected. (Said 1994: 9).

As such, imperialism is of crucial importance to the exercise of knowledge as the mission of the West to conquer, *inter alia*, foreign people, territories, knowledges and polities is legitimised and firmly established within the traits of an imperial-cultural discourse.

Ontological and Epistemological Fallacies

This section is concerned with initiating a Postcolonial critique towards mainstream IR by alluding to ontological and epistemological fallacies that are inherent to the discipline. The aforementioned linkage between imperialism and culture also encloses the barely examined emergence of mainstream IR, which materialised out of the climax of imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century, therefore complicit as an ideologically imbued deliberation (cf. Jones 2006: 3). This is exemplified by Morgenthau's (1948: 26sqq.) far-reaching argument in *Politics Among Nations*, for semiotically and conceptually re-defining "imperialism", because of the arbitrarily appropriation of the expression, as an objective terminology that analytically can be useful for IR; furthermore

[54] Asterisks in this paper are used to critically bring into question heteronormatively gendered linguistic designations and should encourage the reader to question power mechanisms that are operating through language.

contending that an ominous "devil theory" claims that industrial and financial interests urged the United States (US) to partake in the First World War.

As one of the founding fathers of IR, Morgenthau (ibid.: 8-9, 34) is confident in asserting that imperialism is the attempt of a particular sovereign Western nation-state to abolish the existing status quo, that is, the actual and current distribution of power among those entities, although his claims hinge on an ontological and epistemological fallacy - again approved by the "culture of Imperialism" as Krishna (2013: 125) so trenchantly put it - proclaiming that said action is never motivated out of economic interests, but rather amounts to a simple positional reconfiguration within the existing realm of power. Following this reasoning, Neorealists, like Waltz (1978: 136sqq.), further theoretically circumscribed the power-battled-domain of IR as an inherently anarchical sphere, where sovereign nation-states seek the attainment of their self-interests.

Thus, the imperial-cultural discourse at the time of the theoretical inauguration of mainstream IR, which also cultivated various other scientific disciplines and knowledges, incipiently prompted a defence of imperial practices by attempting to ideologically sanitise and objectify the terminology of imperialism - contemplating to bleach out the dark side of this manichean coin. Therefore, imperialism is not merely the venture of a "great power" to demolish the actual distribution of power amid those, but is an ambiguous, transhistorical process rooted within myriad exploitative socio-cultural elements and laws that act inherently genocidal, dispossessing and discriminatory against Indigenous peoples and knowledges; subjectively affecting both, colonised and coloniser[55], while aiming at the structural proliferation of the prerequisites for the reproduction of capitalism (cf. Amin 2009[1989]: 209sq.; Grovogui 1996: 49; Said 1994: xiiisqq.). Consequently, a Postcolonial critique of mainstream IR recognises the necessity to propel a proper historical account of imperialism into the discussion - not one solely applying to the affair between sovereign Western nation-states, but one which scrutinises the imperial relationship of dominance between conquerer and subordinate, synchronously identifying imperialism as constitutive part of the edifice of mainstream IR (Chowdhry, Nair 2002: 2, 11; Darby, Paolini 1994: 379; Georgis, Lugosi 2014: 78).

Thus, such a historicity would emphasise the introductory mentioned ontological and epistemological fallacies, which are not only prominent within the conceptualisation of imperialism, but also pertain to the sovereign Western nation-state, which numerous authors (cf. Baylis et al 2008[1997]: 99sqq.; Waltz 1978: 72) accede the exclusivity of being the lone actor within the anarchical system of IR. The urgency of a revised historical account is underlined by Sørenson's (2011: 117) perpetual exclusion of formally decolonised nation-states, reasserting that through international standards, which also "great powers" are obliged to, former colonised states are protected from the reappearance of colonialism or the usurpation by more powerful states - neglecting the most recent imperialistic invasions by the United States, *inter alia*, of Iraq (cf Chomsky 2005). Ayers (2012: 576) emphasises that this dogma is even more apparent, in the "double standard" Western nation-states are operating with in the international sphere; whereas the latter organise their affairs on the premise of official international law, 'failed states', frequently with a distinct colonised history, are subject to extraordinary methods and procedures. Besides,

[55] The present paper is not explicitly distinguishing between colonialism and imperialism, as such a clear historical discontinuity between the two ought to exist, but the two are entangled with each other as, *inter alia*, genocidal and exploitative practices, as well as a thorough subversions of knowledges pertain to both.

Beier (2005: 15) quit rightly adds that by limiting the focus on the notion of the sovereign Western nation-state, Indigenous societies and the constitutive colonial as well as imperial circumstances of mainstream IR are neglected, resulting in the denial of the political existence of numerous peoples and the scholarly reproduction of colonialism. The reasons why this analytical predominance of the sovereign Western nation-state is problematic, will be addressed later.

To sum up briefly: two, above depicted, ontological and epistemological fallacies by mainstream IR arise, first, out of the conceptualisation of the international sphere exclusively in terms of sovereign Western nation-states, inherently excluding (and continuing to do so) formally decolonised polities, while denying Indigenous peoples and other political communities their existence; as well as, secondly, the delusional misconception of imperialism as a phenomenon not being related to economic interests and exclusively pertaining to power-struggles between sovereign Western nation-states, within an inherently anarchical environment, concomitantly eliding the colonising histories of those actors.

Historical Omissions

The urgent necessity of an accurate historicity in mainstream IR has already been invoked during the delineation of the ontological and epistemological fallacies that are inherent to this discipline. Albeit, there has been what Teschke (2003: 271) terms a "historical turn" within the theoretical sphere of international politics, to which the author certainly contributed to with *The Myth of 1648* and that has also been accredited to the work of Buzan and Little (2000: 3sqq.) - who emphasised the desperate lack of historical awareness within the discipline and aimed at amending this dilemma by resorting to "3500 BC when the Sumerian city-states began to interact in the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates" (ibid.: 1) as genesis of mainstream IR - those accounts do not manage to abandon the analytical as well as imaginary supremacy of a globally isolated and imperial inactive Europe. Teschke (2003: 7sqq.), though conceding that methods of material reproduction - as colonialism is indicative of such - structurally impinge upon IR and typically the formation of the nation-state, solely re-traces the emergence of these political concepts among European fragments of history, while Seth (2013: 17sq.) critically points to the recurring evocation of the foundational myth of Europe, as the native encapsulated land of the modern nation-state, present within the work of Buzan and Little (2000).

These figments chiefly rest on the constant recital by mainstream IR of 1648 and 1919 as the originating dates of the discipline. The former, most prominent for the establishment of the sovereign nation-state is also identified by Teschke (2003: 245) as the gene locus of the discipline's deception, as not only modern but also absolutist patterns of sovereignty converged upon this historical moment, while de Carvalho et al (2011: 740) further argue that the Peace of Augsburg (1555) was actually more significant to the establishment of the European order, than the one of Westphalia (1648), which essentially redeemed elements of sovereignty. On the other hand the latter, 1919, is regularly referred to as mainstream IR's birthdate as a standalone discipline, as in the aftermath of the First World War scholars attempted to comprehend the logic behind the outbreak of violence - between the sovereign Western nation-states that is - with the benevolent intention of thwarting the reiteration of such an experience. Nevertheless, the decontextualised prevalence of 1648 and 1919 obscures the imperialistic background, the inherently racist and

Eurocentric discourse in which the founding scholars gyrated, infusing them to regularly beseech the notion of a supreme Western civilisation (ibid.: 749sq.)

This non-reflective approach relating to their own geopolitical position, which is partly due to the positivist beliefs of IR at the time (cf. de Carvalho et al 2011: 746), led scholars to the confident assumption to erect this discipline on the calamitous and genocidal ruins of colonialism and imperialism. Sankaran Krishna aptly points out that

> [f]ounded as it [IR] is on discourses that justified, abstracted and rationalized the genocide of the populations of the so-called new world, the enslavement of Africans, and colonization of the Asians, the discipline of IR is one giant strategy of containment (Krishna 2001: 407, 408)

Additionally, this dogma is prominent within other narratives of mainstream IR, as he* (2001: 404) rightfully questions the overtly dubious assumption that the historical phase between 1815 and 1914 is distinguishable as a time of tremendous peace, ignoring imperial endeavours like the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860[56]) between China and the British Empire that left behind a Chinese populace in miserable and subordinate conditions (cf. Lovell 2011: 38). Furthermore, Chowdhry and Rai (2009: 87) build upon Krishna's exposure of IR's historical omission and appropriately coin this the "misnamed Hundred Years of Peace", emphasising that colonised peoples were not apprehended as sovereign subjects and therefore 'war' and 'peace' did not apply to those Others. This perception is even further reiterated and succeeds within Security Studies, which clings to these nation-state-centric conceptualisations and thereby excludes vulnerable and colonised populations, who constitute the majority of people globally (Barkawi, Laffey 2006: 332; Shaw 2002: 61).

Accordingly, neither colonialism and imperialism are of substantial significance to the analysis of mainstream IR, nor are the current relationships between the Global North and the Global South. Concealing itself behind the mask of nation-state sovereignty, established on the Western bricks of the First World War and a resistant positivistic stance - indifferent to the own geopolitical and -social positionality (cf. Darby, Paolini 1994: 374, 378) - the discipline ideologically dismisses a historical account that includes the baffling amount of genocidal practices that where unleashed by the Western colonial and imperial powers. The here solicited historical omissions are associated with the ontological and epistemological fallacies discussed in the section beforehand and not only address mainstream IR's disdain of the protracted practices of colonialism and imperialism, but rather emphasise that historical omissions - like the inertia towards the Opium Wars or the slave trade (Jones 2006: 4) - were deliberately posited as evidence by and therefore are partially co-constitutive of the imperial-cultural discourse that incubated mainstream IR.

Although authors of the historical turn, as Teschke (2003) or Buzan and Little (2000), have made inroads into closer scrutinising the fragile historical structure the discipline rests on, those works have not managed to unfetter themselves from the imagination of a globally isolated Europe where the ideational model of the sovereign Western nation-state endogenously came into existence, purposely disregarding that the treaties of Westphalia and Augsburg coincided with the practices of genocidal colonial regimes (cf. Seth 2011: 173). Thereby this paper argues, joining Barkawi and Laffey's (2006: 344) insight, that without critically scrutinising the historical and discursive imperial

[56] For the historical dates see Pletcher (2015).

contexts of mainstream IR and its surrounding sub-disciplines, like Security Studies, cursory inquiries inevitably side with the more powerful, imperial Western power and not the vulnerable, colonised and oppressed peoples. This fatality is necessitated by the intrinsic Eurocentric assumptions of mainstream IR, which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

Eurocentric and Racist Assumptions

Merging the *interdependent* arguments from the preceding two sections; first, the ontological and epistemological fallacies contingent upon the notion of the sovereign Western nation-state being the exclusive actor within the anarchical international system and the argument for a non-economic and non-exploitative definition of imperialism; as well as, secondly, the historical omissions that neglect the actual colonial and imperial endeavours of its actors, mainstream IR arises out and is indicative of an imperial-cultural discourse. This section will outline the discipline's inherently Eurocentric and racist assumptions that are supported by the aforementioned fallacies and omissions, resulting in a summary of the advanced Postcolonial critique aimed at mainstream IR.

To solidify the argument that mainstream IR is part of an imperial-cultural discourse, a few of the following lines are briefly recapitulating the aforesaid. First and foremost, the inherent Eurocentrism of the discipline is demonstrated by the restricted validity of the conceptualisations of 'war' and 'peace' that only apply to the relations between sovereign Western nation-states, while violent altercations within the colonised world are denigrated as peripheral, asymmetrical conflicts or "small wars", as Barakawi and Laffey (2006: 330, 332) already have alluded to. In turn, this dogma then contributed to the deception of the discipline that the period between 1815 and 1914 was characterised by an omni-prevalence of peace (Chowdhry, Rai 2009: 87). Furthermore, because of the Eurocentric misconception of sovereign Western nation-states as the exclusive international actors, Indigenous peoples were denied their political existence (Beier 2005: 15) and simultaneously served as the oppositional projection surface in the process of Othering.

Othering then, as Persaud and Walker (2001: 375) briefly circumscribe it as a multi-layered political and social process that produces and consequently inscribes, *inter alia*, racialised and gendered differences into identities, is, although rather unapparent, tremendously important to understand mainstream IR. As indicated in the previous section, concerned with the historical omissions, Western civilisation was apprehended by the founding IR-scholars as supreme in relation to others. Nevertheless, the question therefore arises; how social processes are coupled with the notion of the sovereign nation-state that is primarily confined to the principle of territorial integrity. Doty addresses this by pointing to the linkage between political space and the formation of identity, stating that:

> [w]hile ostensibly attached to territory, […] spatial differentiations depended upon and were/are made possible by a series of oppositional constructs that are quite familiar to us:, *e.g.* [italics in original]: traditional/modern, backward/advanced, democratic/totalitarian and so on (Doty 1993: 455).

Bolstering the assertion that mainstream IR is not exclusively bound to the principle of territorial integrity, but also relied in its constitutive stages on the processes of cultural Othering, is neatly underlined by the jingoistic truism of the discipline that its designed political entities are also characterised by a distinct cultural identity (Seth 2011: 178). Furthermore, Said points to the

continuity of this misperception by trenchantly arguing that "[i]n time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them' almost always with some degree of xenophobia" (Said. 1995: xiii). As this doctrine is also inherent to mainstream IR, the assessment follows that a racist ontology is operating at the foundation of the discipline, relying on a taxonomy that invokes essentialistic terms to classify human beings - repetitively constructing a normative ideal in relation to its deviant Other.

Thereby, categorisations such as 'Race' function as identity markers that are inherently endowed with clear configurations of power, which constantly reproduce a dominant - often European - model antithetical to a subordinate, aberrant - often non-European - Other (cf. Jones 2006: 2). Krishna (2001: 408) concisely accentuates this by pointing out that during the "discovery of the New World" the former coopted the highly esteemed terminologies, like civilisation, culture, science, property, and rationality, while using the negatively connoted adversarial conceptualisations such as barbarianism, superstition, and irrationality to describe the latter[57].

Hence, this antagonistic inherently Eurocentric and racist vocabulary, which confirmed the supremacy of the sovereign Western nation-state, was also employed at the founding moment of mainstream IR in 1919, at a juncture whereas the discipline struggled to comprehend the tragic devastation of the First World war, its main actors were deeply entrenched within colonial and imperial practices that were justified by exactly this terminology, purporting the need to 'civilise' 'Barbarians' (cf.Ayers 2012: 577; Jones 2006: 2; Salter 2002: 15sq.). Thus, as Said pointed out earlier that the construction of a homogeneous cultural identity, which should fit onto the spatially defined framework of the nation-state, operated accordingly racist as processes of Othering - defining what 'we' as a nation are in eliding, denunciating what 'we' are not and synchronously ascribing it to what constitutes 'them' - are also embroiled in the making of the ideology of mainstream IR. Morgenthau (1948: 96sqq.) underscores this argument by defining "National Character" (ibid.: 96) and "National Morale" (ibid.: 100) as decisive elements that determine the power capability of one sovereign Western nation-state. Consequently, the actuality of a homogenous cultural identity is essential to mainstream IR.

Simultaneously, this implies that humans not identifying with the outlined parameters of the Eurocentric political entity have to be assimilated, the 'Barbarians' need to be 'civilised' or integrated into sovereign nation-states. The sustained and reproduced supremacy of this model then attained, as Chowdhry and Nair argue,

> cognitive authority, and a hegemonic and disciplining effect on global politics. It has not only ignored the question of representation, but has also assumed that mainstream IR's language is universal and unproblematic, giving it the authority to speak for and about others (Chowdhry, Nair 2002: 14).

Thus, for mainstream IR, Eurocentric sovereignty universally characterises the nation-state as highest political authority, which struggles in an anarchical environment for the attainment of its self-interests, and concomitantly works as an ontologically exclusionary device denying political communities that value different political elements or pursue a peculiar conceptualisation of sovereignty, like Indigenous peoples, their actual existence and place within the discipline (cf. Beier

[57] For a detailed account of the evoked tropes that legitimised the European conquest of territories, human beings, and knowledges see Anne McClintock's (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.

2005: 15; Chowdhry, Rai 2009: 87). Therefore, sovereignty also services as an incentive to 'civilise', to make Indigenous people apt to integrate themselves into the Eurocentric fabric of the nation-state.

Albeit, racism in mainstream IR works twofold. First, as portrayed above, by the dominance of the sovereign Western nation-state being the solely acknowledged political organisation with a homogenous cultural identity supporting it and, secondly, after universally implanting this model[58] mainstream IR still renders formally decolonised states insignificant to the anarchical field, terming insufficient state formations as "failed states"[59] that endogenously are not able to adhere to the Eurocentric conceptualisation (Ayers 2012: 571).

Summarising the Postcolonial critique of mainstream IR, the three previously depicted, interdependent critical threads concatenate here to a coherent rope that leads to the main argument of this paper, disclosing mainstream IR as a direct output of an imperial-cultural discourse that is inherently Eurocentric and racist. How so? Explained in the section concerning ontological and epistemological fallacies, one of mainstream IR's foundational works, *Politics Among Nations* (1948), engages in a defence of the conceptualisation of imperialism, while proposing a non-economic version that is aimed at sanitising the exploitative and genocidal content of the term. By only awarding the sovereign Western nation-state the capability to engage in mainstream IR, deviant forms of political organisation, like those by Indigenous peoples, are rejected. These epistemic misconceptions are maintained by providing a historical account that is rife with omissions, ideologically operating in favour of mainstream IR, as the period between the Congress of Vienna (1814-15[60]) and the outbreak of the First World War (1914[61]) are interpreted as inherently peaceful - purposely ignoring the meanwhile ongoing genocidal phases of colonialism and imperialism. Despite seminal works investigating the dubious foundational historic dates (1648 and 1919) of the discipline, like those of Teschke (2003) or Buzan and Little (2000), those authors were not able to break free from the illusion that the sovereign Western nation-state endogenously emerged out of an intra-European constellation that was isolated from other regions, peoples, and knowledges - despite the existing colonial and imperial Western empires at the time. Those fallacies and omissions then constitute the reasons for and consequences of Eurocentric and racist assumptions that are inherent in the construction of mainstream IR. By only admitting the notion of the sovereign Western nation-state into the anarchical realm of IR, other political entities that work with peculiar ideational conceptions are denied their existence and autonomy. In unison processes of Othering are deployed to 'civilise' the 'Barbarians' so that that the chimera of a sovereign nation-state congruent with a homogenised culture can be preserved, constructing antithetical identities of 'us' and 'them', while the former always retains the interpretational sovereignty and power over

[58] One of the justifying arguments for universally enforcing the Eurocentric concept of sovereignty relies upon the misperceived non-violent behaviour of sovereign Western nation-states - rendering the Era of the Cold War as an inherently peaceful one, as Krishna (2001: 406) demonstrates. Ruggie (1993: 163) approves this and supports the assumption that through the mutual recognition of sovereign nation-states, violent political action - between them - decreased.

[59] Ayers (2012: 572) concisely argues that "'failed states' are characterised as those where the government does not possess the monopoly of the means of violence, or are considered a threat to Western security, such as the 'rogue' states of the 'axis of evil' infamy".

[60] For the historical date see Encyclopedia Britannica (2015).

[61] For the historical date see Showalter (2015).

the latter. On the other hand, mainstream IR's inherent racism is displayed when nation-states follow the Eurocentric instructions on how to model a political entity, but only manage to insufficiently do so. Deviant and faulty emulations are willingly termed by its ideology as 'failed states,' providing the sovereign Western powers with an impetus to actively intervene and resume their imperial and colonial exploitations. Therefore, mainstream IR is based upon the elision of colonialism and imperialism, obscuring its ideological underpinnings aided by an ostensibly humanistic vocabulary of 'humanitarian intervention' or 'development', reiterating its intuition of universality (cf. Ayers 2012: 571sqq.). With this critique in mind, the present paper now directs the attention towards a rough illustration of the events in Nigeria concerning Boko Haram.

A Postcolonial Excursion into Boko Haram

This short excursion into the case of Boko Haram focuses on highlighting the complex and transnational character of this situation by sketching out the violent turn of the group, its recruiting audience, structural factors in northern Nigeria that contributed to Boko Haram's proliferation, the Multi-National-Joint-Taskforce (MNJTF) battling the group, and global discursive interferences regarding the issue. Hence, the following section is not keen on proposing a solution to this subject, but points to its complex structure. Sadly, this paper is not able, due to limitations in pages, to include the colonised history of Nigeria.

From the outside, as this paper speaks from a Western-European context, the situation in Nigeria can readily be coined as devastating, as fom the violent turn of Boko Haram in 2009 until mid-2015, an estimated 15,000 people have fallen victim to this crisis (Comolli 2015: 109). Weeraratne (2015: 7, 9) estimates that around three Million people live under the rule of the group in the northeastern region of Nigeria, especially in Borno State that is bordered by Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Boko Haram has thoroughly enforced Sharia rule over its controlled territory and operates along the porous Nigerian borders, crossing them for strategic reasons, training or recruitment.

However, to comprehend its violent approach, this paper draws attention to the historical emergence of Boko Haram not intended to excuse its atrocities. "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad" (people of the tradition of the Prophet for preaching and striving), which is the exact and self-definition of the group, while the denomination "Boko Haram"[62] is a label used by the media based on popular impressions of the actor's operations, came into existence in 2002 as students of the University of Maiduguri, dissatisfied with Western education, turned to Mohammed Yusuf at the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque for support, organised themselves and since then oppose the totality of Western culture (Onapajo, Uzodike 2012: 26sq., Weeraratne 2015: 2). Various accounts (cf. Aliyu et al 2015: 315; Hansen, Aliyu Musa 2013: 286; Yusuf 2013: 386;) emphasise that Boko Haram was at its incipient stages a peaceful organisation that under Yusuf strived to pursue the attainment of it's goals even through legal matters, backed by local politicians. In July of 2009, Boko Haram attacked numerous prisons which resulted in a response of special military units of the Nigerian police force that also lead to the successful capture of Yusuf, as Hansen and Aliyu Musa (2013: 286) annotate. Subsequently, Yusuf was extra-judicially

[62] Despite this false nomenclature, the present paper will also use "Boko Haram" instead of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, as the former term is more widely known.

massacred by the state, whose agents act with impunity, resulting in the violent, partially terroristic, and destructive stance the most-known fraction of Boko Haram, led by Abubakar Shekau, displays today[63]. This points to the immensely fragmented character of the group and it's assumed multiple cells, making it difficult to paint a coherent picture of Boko Haram[64] (ibid: 286sq.; Aliyu et al 2015: 315; Onapajo, Uzodike 2012: 30; Weeraratne 2015: 18; Yusuf 2013: 385).

The recruitment audience for Boko Haram has not altered; still dissatisfied young people, unemployed, migrants from Sudan, Chad or Niger, and former Almajirai[65] are prone to join the group. The high unemployment (70-80%) and poverty rate (72% living below the poverty line) in the North, the incompetence as well as unwillingness of the Nigerian government to transfer the accumulated wealth out of oil-business to the broader public, have contributed to the growth of disenchanted people. (Hansen, Aliyu Musa 2013: 287; Onapajo, Uzodike 2012: 27; Tonwe, Eke 2013: 234sqq.). Thus, it is to no surprise that the governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, stated that

> despite his "misguided ideology", the late leader of the *Boko Haram* [italics in original] was able to retain the loyalty of his followers through, among others, provision of a meal a day to each member, setting up a youth empowerment scheme and organising cheap marriages among them (Yusuf 2013: 380).

Onapajo and Uzodike (2012: 34) highlight the reasons, why the economic sector has been failing so many young humans and point to it's restructuring in the wake of the neoliberal surge, disguised as the IMF and Worldbank-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which swept across the country during the 1980s and 1990s, redirecting economic policy away from agricultural production - which was primarily focused on the North - to the exploitation of oil resources in the southern area of Nigeria. Although at the beginning of the 1990s Anyanwu (1992: 6sqq.) already posited that poverty was widespread, the economy was heavily dependent on oil, and economic benefits should domestically be disseminated more equally; the 1986-SAPs of the Babangida administration (1985-1993[66]) did not ameliorate the crises. Therefore, an enormous neoliberal transformation within the social relations of allocation and production in Nigeria partially gave rise to the non-state group Boko Haram.

Given its recent violent interactions, especially the abduction of more than 250 girls from a school in Chibok and the increased territorial control in northeastern parts of Nigeria, Boko Haram emerged as a distinct regional actor (Weeraratne 2015: 2). Through its cross-border operations, which have enabled the group to easily obtain weapons, hide from Nigerian forces, or to use the Niger desert for training; Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameron set up the MNJTF to militarily engage Boko Haram. Partially financed by the US and Great Britain, as well as the involvement of France in intelligence sharing, not only regional nation-states, but also the "great powers", imperial

[63] For a more detailed account of the groups' violent strategy, see Aliyu et al (2015: 312sqq.), of how it's activities have changed and expanded over the years see Weeraratne (2015: 4sqq.).
[64] Thus, the more violent fraction, presumable under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, even executed one of its own members that was engaged in a peaceful dialogue to end the conflict (Hansen, Aliyu Musa 2013: 286sq.).
[65] Almajirai are males between primary-school age and their twenties that were sent by their parent to enrol in college, to study the Qur'an while being obliged to earn their own living. In contrast to Almajirai in rural parts, who help out their teachers on the farm, those in urban centres have to make their living through begging (Hoechner 2011: 713sqq.). As they live in miserable conditions Almajirai are easy recruiting targets for extremist groups (Tonwe, Eke 2013: 235).
[66] For the historical date see Olawale (2014: 81).

entities, are expressing their interests in a military solution to the inherently transnational conflict, that is contributed to by South African private contractors (Aliyu et al 2015: 8; Comolli 2015: 110sqq.).

On a more discursive level, Michelle Obama (First Lady of the US) added her* voice to the social media campaign "#Bringbackourgirls" which is aimed at internationally raising awareness of the abduction of the aforementioned school girls in Chibok. Obama stated that her husband had outreached to the Nigerian government to assure every support needed to find the schoolgirls (The Guardian 2014). The First Lady's intention was bolstered at this year's anniversary of the abduction by Nobel Peace Price Winner Malala Yousafzai (2015), calling upon "the Nigerian authorities and the international community to do more to bring you [the abducted school girls] home". Meanwhile Jumoke Balogun (2014), a Nigeran-American journalist, has questioned the social media campaign and rightfully indicated that it further legitimises the attainment of US interests in the region. Simultaneously, newly elected president Muhannadu Buhari, though being opposed towards the engagement of private contractors, has endorsed the military support by the US - contrary to his predecessor (Buhari 2015; Comolli 2015: 113).

Conclusion

As introductory stated, this paper is not concerned with a thorough case study of the complex situation in Nigeria, regarding Boko Haram. Rather, the past lines primarily intended to reproduce a profound Postcolonial critique directed at mainstream IR, with the concluding aim to showcase the various failures of the discipline. To briefly recall this; mainstream IR operates with Eurocentric and racist assumptions that are safeguarded by ontological and epistemological fallacies, as well as grave historical omissions - all part of the imperial-cultural discourse out of which mainstream IR emerged.

The discipline would fail on various levels to construe the situation in Nigeria. First, by adopting the theoretical stance that only sovereign nation-states can engage within IR, Boko Haram as a non-state actor utilising terrorism[67] as a "form of politically motivated violence" (Jackson et al 2011: 116) would not be noticed by the discipline. Secondly, this also pertains to the transnational character of the MNJTF which operates across the borders of the main nation-states Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Admittedly, the argument that the MNJTF mirrors a temporally confluence of self-interests by various (regional) nation-states remains viable, unless troops actually materialise out of this notion and attain an inherent transnational character - synchronously falling out of the ontological realm of the discipline.

On a third level, mainstream IR is not concerned about representations in the international sphere and is completely baffled when trying to scrutinise a social media campaign, which exerts pressure upon governments within the transnational anarchistic terrain of the internet. Postcolonialism (*not* Postcolonial-IR) tends more to identities and their portrayal. Thus, when humans with high transnational esteem, like Obama and Yousafzai, argue from their positions, the imperial-culture

[67] This paper agrees with the appraisal of Jackson et al (2011: 160sq.) that a concrete definition of the practice of terrorism in relation to national borders or their transgression is, in many cases as here with Boko Haram, severely problematic as ambitions, targets and the obtainment of resources by violent non-state actors pertains to various regional, national, or international contexts.

discourse's patterns of power surface, demonstrating that while numerous voices speak for the Other, those two emerge as especially vociferous and echo from the White House to northeastern Nigeria. Those allegedly humanistic appearing assertions of Obama and Yousafzai, as mentioned above, easily reveal themselves as inherently imperialistic and actually, by supporting the Nigerian government, constitute an intensive call for a violent solution to this conflict that conceals the discriminatory, violent politics of the Nigerian government; ultimately augmenting the flow of tears and blood of oppressed Nigerians.

The short excursion into northern Nigeria was carried out to illustrate the sheer complexity of the situation. Due to limits in resources the imperial and colonial story of Nigeria could not be reviewed, but would have explained the ideological and socio-economic context intrinsic to the emergence of Boko Haram. A historical step back into colonial times would have provided further insights because, as Hansen and Aliyu Musa (2013: 288) already argue, the encounter between the British conquerers and their Muslim adversaries in the North indicates transhistorical ramifications that echo into the present time. Otherwise, by neglecting historical or macro-structural processes, shortsighted statements, as from CNN-Reporter Isha Sesay (2015), emerge that hastily label members of Boko Haram "fanatical thugs", ignoring the desperate situation those humans might have been subjected to.

Concluding, this paper has exemplified how a Postcolonial critique of mainstream IR reveals the discipline's Eurocentric and racist assumptions that are based on ontological and epistemological fallacies, as well as historical omissions. In the next step, a rough illustration of the manifold situation in Nigeria, regarding Boko Haram, led to the assertion that mainstream IR fails to analytically elucidate these circumstances and is paralysed when trying to make sense of transnational processes and cultural representations, whether they materialise on the ground or manifest themselves in a discursive way. Here, a Postcolonial perspective can provide remedy as discursive cultural representations are part of the analytical vehicle of the discipline and a more critical, historical perspective onto colonialism and imperialism opens up the possibility for an analysis that immerses into knowledge-systems that include the continuous relevant stories of the vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed peoples.

References

Anyanwu, John C. (1992): President Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme and Inflation in Nigeria. In: Journal of Social Development in Africa 7:1, pp. 5-24.

Amin, Samir 2009 [1989]: Eurocentrism. Second Edition, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Aliyu, Ahmed; Moorthy, Ravichandran; Bin Idris, Nor Azizan (2015): Towards Understanding the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria. In: Asian Social Science 11:10, pp. 307-317.

Ayers, Alison J. (2012): An illusion of the epoch: Critiquing the ideology of 'failed states'. In: International Politics, 49:5, pp. 568-590.

Balogun, Jumoke (2014): Dear Americans, Your Hashtags Won't #BringBackOurGirls; You Might Actually Be Making Things Worse http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jumoke-balogun/hashtags-wont-bringbackourgirls_b_5292312.html [Accessed on: 25/08/2015].

Barkawi, Tarak; Laffey, Mark (2006): The postcolonial moment in security studies. In: Review of International Studies 32, pp. 329-352.

Baylis, John; Smith, Steve; Owens, Patricia (2008[1997]): The Globalization of World Politics. An introduction to international relations. Fourth Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. E-Book.

Beier, Marshall J. (2005): International Relations in Uncommon Places. Indigeneity, Cosmology and the Limits of International Theory. New York, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Buhari, Muhammadu (2015): Muhammadu Buhari: We Will Stop Boko Haram. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/opinion/muhammadu-buhari-we-will-stop-boko-haram.html?_r=0 [Accessed on: 25/08/2015].

Buzan, Barry; Little Richard (2000): International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations. Oxford: Oxford University Press. E-Book.

Chomsky, Noam (2005): Imperial Presidency. In: Canadian Dimension 39:1. http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20041217.htm [Accessed on: 17/08/2015].

Chowdhry, Geeta; Nair, Sheila (2002): Introduction: Power in a postcolonial world: race, gender, and class in international relations. In: Chowdhry, Geeta; Nair, Sheila (eds.*): Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations. Reading race, gender and class. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-32.

Chowdhry, Geeta; Rai, Shirin M. (2009): The Geographies of Exclusion and the Politics of Inclusion: Race-based Exclusions in the Teaching of International Relations. In: International Studies Perspectives 10, pages 84-91.

Comolli, Virginia (2015): The Regional Problem of Boko Haram. In: Survival: Global Politics and Strategy 57:4, pp. 109-117.

Darby, Phillip; Paolini, A.J. (1994): Briding International Relations and Postcolonialism. In: Alternatives 19, pp. 371-397.

de Carvalho, Benjamin; Leira, Halvard; Hobson, John M. (2011): The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919. In: Millenium: Journal of International Studies 39:3, pp. 735-758.

Doty, Roxanne Lynn (1993): The Bounds of 'Race' in International Relations. In: Millenium: Journal of International Studies 22:3, pp. 443-461.

Encyclopedia Britannica (2015): Congress of Vienna. http://global.britannica.com/event/Congress-of-Vienna [Accessed on: 25/08/2015].

Hansen, William W; Aliyu Musa, Umma (2013): Fanon, the Wretched and Boko Haram. In: Journal of Asian and African Studies 48:3, pp. 281-296.

Georgis, Miriam; Lugosi, Nicole V. T. (2014): (Re)inserting race and indigeneity in international relations theory: a post-colonial approach. In: Global Change, Peace and Security 26:1, pp. 71-83.

Grovogui, Siba N'Zatioula (1996): Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans. Race and Self-Determination in International Law. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

Hoechner, Hannah (2011): Striving for Knowlede and Dignity: How Qur'anic Students in Kano, Nigeria, Learn to Live with Rejection and Educational Disadvantage. In: European Journal of Development Research 23, pp. 712-728.

Jackson, Richard; Jarvis, Lee; Gunning, Jeroen; Smyth, Marie Breen (2011): Terrorism. A Critical Introduction. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, Branwen Gruffydd (2006): Introduction: International Relations, Eurocentrism, and Imperialism. In: Jones, Branwen Gruffydd (ed.): Decolonizing International Relations. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.: Lanham, pp. 1-19.

Krishna, Sankaran (2001): Race, Amnesia, and the Education of International Relations. In: Alternatives 26, pp. 401-424.

Lovell, Julia (2011): The Opium War. Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China. Basingstoke, Oxfod: Picador.

McClintock, Anne (1995): Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York, London: Routledge.

Mignolo, Walter D. (2000): Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Morgenthau, Hans J. (1948): Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Onapajo, Hakeem; Uzodike, Ufo Okeke (2012): Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. In: African Security Review 21:3, pp. 24-39.

Olawale, Salami B. (2014): The Prelude to Babangida Regime's Foreign Policy Initiatives. In: Mediterranean Journal of Social Science 5:3, pp. 81-85.

Persaud, Randolph B.; Walker, R.B.J. (2001): Apertura: Race in International Relations. In: Apertura 26, pp. 373-376.

Pletcher, Kenneth (2015): Opium Wars. In: Encyclopedia Britannica. http://global.britannica.com/topic/Opium-Wars [Accessed on: 16/08/2015].

Ruggie, John Gerard (1993): Territoriality and beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations. In: International Organization 47:1, pp. 139-174.

Salter, Mark B. (2002): Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations. London: Pluto Press.

Said, Edward W.(1994): Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage Books.

Said, Edward W. (2003[1978]): Orientalism. London: Penguin Books.

Seth, Sanjay (2011): Postcolonial Theory and the Critique of International Relations. In: Millenium: Journal of International Studies 40:1, pp. 167-183.

Seth, Sanjay (2013): Postcolonial theory and the critique of international relations. In: Seth, Sanjay (ed.): Postcolonial Theory and International Relations. A critical introduction. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 15-31.

Shaw, Karena (2002): Indigeneity and the International. In: Millenium: Journal for International Studies 31:1, pp. 55-81.

Sesay, Isha (2015): #BringBackOurGirls, one year on: 'We should all feel shame' http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/14/opinions/sesay-bring-back-our-girls-one-year-on/ [Accessed on: 25/08/2015].

Showalter, Dennis E. (2015): World War I. http://global.britannica.com/event/World-War-I [Accessed on: 25/08/2015]

Sørensen, Georg (2011): 'Big and Important Things' in IR. Structural realism and the neglect of changes in statehood. In: Booth, Ken [ed.*]: Realism and World Politics. Oxon, New York: Routledge, pp. 107-123.

Teschke, Benno (2003): The Myth of 1648. Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations. London, New York: Verso.

The Guardian (2014): Michelle Obama: Barack and I see our own daughters in Nigerian schoolgirls. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/10/michelle-obama-nigeria-schoolgirls-kidnapping-boko-haram [Accessed on: 25/08/2015]

Tonwe, Daniel A.; Eke, Surulola (2013): State fragility and violent uprisings in Nigeria. In: African Security Review 22:4, pp. 232-243.

Waltz, Kenneth N. (1979): Theory of International Politics. Reading et al: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Weeraratne, Suranjan (2015): Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. In: Terrorism and Political Violence, pp. 1-25.

Yousafzai, Malala (2015): My Open Letter to the Abducted Chibok Schoolgirls. https://medium.com/stronger-than/malala-s-open-letter-to-the-abducted-chibok-schoolgirls-4af420a5d19d [Accessed on: 25/08/2015].

Yusuf, Hakeem O. (2013): Harvest of violence: the neglect of basic rights and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. In: Critical Studies on Terrorism 6:3, pp. 371-391.