

***A Whole New World: Reinventing International Studies for the Post-Western World.* By Pierre Lizee. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011. Hardcover: 250pp.**

Pierre Lizee's *A Whole New World: Reinventing International Studies for the Post-Western World* addresses a fundamental problem for international studies: how does the field remain relevant in a world that it struggles to explain?

Lizee argues that the world is shifting away from a Western-centric political and economic system towards one where non-Western states and actors matter far more than in the recent past. However, the dominant theories of International Relations (IR) are woefully inadequate to explain the interests, actions and motivations of most of the states of this emerging world. The book is an analysis of the reasons for the limitations of the dominant theories in the field and is an appeal for the need to create new kinds of universal theories that can address these deficiencies. Lizee provides insightful criticisms of Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and the various post-structural and Marxist theories. However, the author is somewhat weaker in offering concrete suggestions for how international studies should evolve, though he does identify the key factors that any theoretical evolution must take into account.

My primary criticism of the book is that it is too intent on drawing a distinction between the Western and non-Western worlds. As a result, it may concede more validity to mainstream theories than is strictly necessary. I believe that many of the criticisms that Lizee makes of mainstream IR theories can be applied to their depiction of the Western world as well as the non-Western world. Admittedly, they fit more neatly into the Western model, but they manifest many of the same limitations and encourage the same misdiagnoses and blind spots that, Lizee argues, undermine their relevance to the non-Western world.

Lizee begins by noting that Realism and Liberalism, the dominant IR theories, make claims to universalism that do not reflect the reality of the non-Western world. Realism assumes that humans are rational but violent beings whose rationality impels them to create states, within which violence is controlled. Anarchy at the global level means violence remains an international problem. Liberals agree that all humans are rational and argue that they can make the choice not to use violence, particularly when they can pursue material benefits. Realist and Liberal logics are supposed to apply to

all human beings. Theories such as Constructivism, Post-modernism, Marxism and post-Marxism criticize the universalist assumptions of Realism and Liberalism, but then introduce universal concepts of their own and are tainted by their focus on the “incomplete accounts of global international life” (p. 70) embodied by the two dominant theories.

Lizee makes this case most clearly in reference to what he calls the “economy of violence” (p. 86). Mainstream rationalist approaches assume that human beings can choose not to resort to violence in dealing with each other. However, Lizee points out that in many non-Western states, the political institutions necessary for the exercise of choice have been destroyed, never existed or lack legitimacy. In these conditions, violence is a matter of survival and, as such, a rational course of action. This subverts the Realist assumption that there is a clear difference between violence inside and outside the state. Liberalism focuses on individual human identity and the liberating power of markets and fails to fully consider the political and economic effects of other, communal self-identities and the impact of externally-imposed economic systems. Lizee argues that the solution lies in finding new, more flexible universal concepts. Realism, for example, must understand violence as contingent on the institutional reality of a given state, rather than assuming its relationship to the state.

Lizee’s book is scrupulously argued and powerfully grounded in the philosophy of IR theory. It makes its claims strongly and confidently and its central arguments are difficult to refute. The central claim that IR theory is inadequate to deal with the emerging world is not new. This is a problem that has been evident to many of us who have studied the international relations of the developing world, even as we find ourselves caught in the trap of having to constantly reference the mainstream approaches. As examples, Lizee cites books edited by Stephanie Neuman (1998) and Acharya and Johnston (2009). He claims new ground by pointing out how even Post-modern, Marxist and Constructivist theories are tainted by their associations with mainstream Realism and Liberalism. Lizee’s central argument is sound, though critics might argue that he ignores some of the more subtle variations on these critical theories.

I think that Lizee’s argument can be even more ambitious. He appears to accept that the established theories work relatively well in reference to the West, but this is a questionable claim. The failure of the dominant theories to predict or explain the end of the Cold War is well-known. Lizee’s argument around the

“economy of violence” underplays the Western experience with these same dynamics. Mohammed Ayoob, whom Lizee cites, appears to interpret Classical Realism differently. Ayoob argues that Hobbes developed his Realism to encourage and justify state-building in the West. Ayoob draws parallels to the present condition of state-building in the developing world, and refers to this application as “subaltern realism”. Violence was used to create the environment that allowed for rational decision-making in the West. Similarly, when discussing the importance of multiple identities and the use of Constructivism in the emerging world, Lizee implies that Western states have adopted liberal values that transcend group identities. But this is demonstrably not the case. In modern Europe, the most salient political and cultural conflicts are over how to accommodate non-European people and religions in Western societies. Some of these arguments are about liberal vs. non-liberal values, but many are rooted in concerns about ethnic identity. In the United States, domestic politics is grounded in cultural, economic and geographical divisions. Running through all of these is the toxic politics of race. Insofar as Democrat and Republican Party foreign policies are different, this has international implications.

Overall, this is an excellent and thought-provoking book that addresses a fundamentally important topic. It should assist the development of international studies into a more comprehensive and practically useful discipline.