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Which ‘C’ Are You Talking about? Critical Meets Cultural IPE

Matthias Kranke
University of Warwick

Jacqueline Best and Matthew Paterson, eds, *Cultural Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2010, xix+239 pp.).

Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney, eds, *Critical International Political Economy: Dialogue, Debate and Dissensus* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, xiii+195 pp.).

Introduction

International Political Economy is a diverse field of enquiry that accommodates competing foundational stances. Like political science in general,¹ the discipline has never been marked by methodological, let alone ontological or epistemological, consensus. Two recent edited volumes are representative of the salient disagreements about its rightful ‘fundamentals’: Both *Critical International Political Economy: Dialogue, Debate and Dissensus* and *Cultural Political Economy* reject the purportedly objective premises that IPE has inherited from neo-classical economics. This broad framing then leads each to articulate a particular conception of the global political economy and to claim a different disciplinary role for its version of IPE.

This review article maps the positions of critical and cultural IPE within this diverse field. To this end, I propose a stylised analogy as a heuristic mapping device. Think of IPE as a par-

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¹ Anita Fischer and Daniela Tepe, “‘What’s Critical about Critical Theory’: Feminist Materialism, Intersectionality and the Social Totality of the Frankfurt School”, In *Critical International Political Economy: Dialogue, Debate and Dissensus*, eds Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132–48, here 148, note 8.

liamentary polity with elections at regular intervals. There is the majority group of the incumbent government, which remains confident of running things properly despite the occasional mistake; there is the parliamentary opposition, which promises to run things differently from within the established institutions; and, finally, there is the extra-parliamentary opposition, which pushes for radical change from outside the dedicated platforms for political contestation. In this analogy, orthodox IPE acts like the disciplinary government majority, cultural IPE like the parliamentary opposition and critical IPE like the extra-parliamentary opposition. Similar to political alternatives that bring about only marginal change, however, this double opposition does not fully destabilise the underpinnings of the discipline. Applying post-racist insights from the works of John M. Hobson and James M. Blaut, I instead show that both ‘C’ strands are themselves riddled with unacknowledged traces of Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies, albeit to different degrees. For the sake of informed research and teaching, it is necessary to reveal, unravel and overcome such foundational limitations.

The review article is structured as follows. I begin with a summary of each volume to highlight what the contributors regard as ‘critical’ or ‘cultural’ analyses of the global political economy. Next, I employ the analogy of the parliamentary polity to assess the engagements of critical and cultural IPE with orthodox IPE. In a related step, I discuss how Eurocentrism afflicts even these decidedly non-orthodox strands and why their limitations matter to the wider discipline. I conclude with a call for mapping further the territory where critical and cultural IPE meet.

The Contours of Critical and Cultural IPE

Critical IPE scholars do not mince words about the normative ambitions of their scholarship. At various points, the contributors to Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney’s volume *Critical International Political Economy* invoke a joint ‘emancipatory project’, or a similarly worded agenda, by means of critique of entrenched understandings. Inspired by but moving beyond Antonio Gramsci’s and Robert W. Cox’s seminal works, they build on a pluralist body of critique from ‘outside what is often perceived as orthodox IPE’ (3). The central purpose of their project is to ‘foreground’² foundational questions that they claim have been eclipsed in contemporary IPE debates on methodology. The discursive entry point is Benjamin Cohen’s popularisation of the distinction, consolidated in subsequent debates, between

² By the standards of these two volumes alone, this verb is popular among critical and cultural IPE scholars alike.

the ‘American’ and the ‘British school’ of IPE.³ The contributors share a deep dissatisfaction – made more or less explicit in the chapters – with the fashionable separation of the discipline into these two branches, which has sidelined genuine challengers: ‘... the “transatlantic” debate is serving to prevent dissensus and to put critical thinking in its place – in a closed black box – since it has thus far excluded (intentionally or not) a range of perspectives that offer a more holistic framework ...’ (3).

The volume’s project gradually takes shape over three parts in increasing opposition to orthodox IPE – from ‘Dialogue’ to ‘Debate’ to ‘Dissensus’. The critical engagement in the chapters (three in each part) is much less empirical than philosophical, exhibiting a Marxian flavour of interpretation and change in ‘the progressive commitment towards emancipation’ (Worth, 118). In reverence to Gramscian and Coxian epistemology, the contributors see societal emancipation from capitalism as impossible without intellectual emancipation from mainstream approaches. This line of reasoning is most apparent in those chapters that aim to exorcise the ghost of Cohen by discussing H. N. Brailsford’s work as instance of critical IPE long before the 1970s (Ashworth); accusing the ‘British school’ of complicity in the marginalisation of critical thinking (Worth); and, in a similar vein, urging a retreat from IPE because of phoney bridge-building efforts in the transatlantic divide (Cammack).⁴ The other chapters strive to revive critical IPE not so much against Cohen’s schematic historiography of the discipline as in consideration of its general reception. Spread across all three parts of the volume, they examine the conceptual issues of space (Macartney and Shields), subjectivity (Germain) and the state-market dichotomy (Bruff), and the theoretical approaches of poststructuralism (Griffin), critical feminism in general (Elias) and intersectional feminist materialism in particular (Fischer and Tepe).

Cultural political economists pursue a different academic agenda. Jacqueline Best and Matthew Paterson’s volume *Cultural Political Economy* departs from the criticism that most of the pertinent literature reduces the interplay between culture, politics and the economy to two

³ Benjamin J. Cohen, ‘The transatlantic divide: Why are American and British IPE so different?’, *Review of International Political Economy* 14, no. 2 (2007): 197–219; *International Political Economy: An Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Cohen’s account spawned the release of two special issues in 2009: *Review of International Political Economy* 16(1) on the ‘American school’ and *New Political Economy* 14(3) on the ‘British school’ of IPE. This particular narrative of the field, though with greater emphasis on the heterodox orientations of each school, had previously been developed by Craig N. Murphy and Douglas R. Nelson, ‘International political economy: a tale of two heterodoxies’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3, no. 3 (2001): 393–412.

⁴ This chapter conforms to Cammack’s earlier obituary of the discipline. Paul Cammack, ‘RIP IPE’, *Papers in the Politics of Global Competitiveness* No. 7 (May) (Manchester: Institute for Global Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, e-space Open Access Repository, 2007), <<http://hdl.handle.net/2173/12264>> (accessed 29 May 2013).

of these three aspects (3–5). Thus, the editors intend ‘to bring the culturally inflected IR and critically attuned IPE literatures into conversation with each other and with the cultural economy literature ... and to develop a more robust conception of the cultural dynamics of the global political economy’ (5). This conception integrates the constitutive and contingent effects of culture on the global political economy (12–7). Unlike the other editors, Best and Paterson neither set out to establish an emancipatory project nor to overrule transatlantic stock-taking. A telling indication of the disinterest in disciplinary historiographies is that none of the chapters references Benjamin Cohen’s works. Rather, the contributors seek to render IPE ‘more culturally attuned’ (Walters, 134) by ‘foregrounding’ the cultural, the political or the economic in the tangible and intangible empirical representations of the global political economy.

The volume approaches the cultural attuning of IPE in four major parts. The individual chapters (again a total of nine) complement each other to draw a nuanced picture of past, present and future cultural political economies. In the first part, the contributors revisit classical texts in political economy (Blaney and Inayatullah) and cultural theory (Davies) to theoretically frame the following, more empirical chapters; in the second, they exemplify the constitution of past politico-economic practices, examining the creation of an early embedded liberal order by visual means from the 1920s to the 1940s (Aitken) and the cultural shifts behind the re-orientation of U.S. financial advisory missions to Latin America in the 1940s (Hel-leiner); in the third, they turn to migration cartographies (Walters) and ethical tourism (Lisle) as two examples of how cultural layering may trivialise harsh political and economic realities; in the fourth, they extrapolate future cultural political economies from recent developments in the security realm (Amoore and de Goede), the information sector (Ouellet) and the areas of production and consumption (Thrift). The final part, then, dilutes the impression of an emerging ‘cultural political economy’ because any such undertaking will be compromised by inherently conflicting positions on ‘foundational value’ (Walker).

Critical and Cultural Engagements with Orthodox IPE and Beyond

The contributions of critical and cultural IPE scholars raise important questions for the entire discipline, as my brief summary of each volume has indicated. In this section, I review the varied engagements of the contributors with ‘orthodox’ IPE and with each other. Broadly speaking, critical and cultural political economists occupy common ontological and epistemological ground for contesting the tenets of orthodox IPE. Yet where critical and cultural IPE

meet, they leave traces of Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that are not unique to them.

Critical and cultural IPE do not relate to orthodox IPE in the same way. Although neither volume represents the respective ‘C’ strand in its entirety, a general pattern emerges: Critical IPE engages directly with – that is, critiques – orthodox IPE, as epitomised by Cohen’s historiography. Such direct engagement may amount to an outright dismissal of IPE as a legitimate intellectual site for the study of the global political economy (Cammack). Cultural IPE opts for a less direct engagement, which still casts enough doubt on the ability of orthodox IPE to conduct ‘culturally attuned’ empirical research. Critical and cultural political economists seek to remodel IPE, even if along different lines. The analogy of the parliamentary polity makes sense of their different disciplinary roles. Critical IPE resembles an extra-parliamentary opposition, which disputes the legitimacy of the entire system (the discipline of IPE); cultural IPE assumes the role of a parliamentary opposition, whose dissatisfaction focuses solely on the performance of the government majority (orthodox IPE).

We require some understanding of the boundaries of orthodox IPE before we can gauge how critical and cultural IPE relate to it. The most sensible way to define an intellectual orthodoxy is in relational terms: by what it is (and is not) relative to alternative views of the world. Critical IPE scholars keep at a greater ontological and epistemological distance from works considered ‘mainstream’ in contemporary IPE. They do not identify with the ‘American’ or the ‘British school’. Critical scholars doubt that the British school (still) deserves praise for providing more room for ‘heterodox’ thinking. For the likes of Owen Worth and Paul Cammack, these schools do not house two competing variants of IPE but embody two shades of orthodoxy. Put differently, the fundamental problem with this American-British orthodoxy is not its ‘missing middle’⁵ but its broken-off fringes. Cultural IPE scholars, for their part, deplore the cultural myopia of most IPE scholarship. Their primary target is far more diffuse, reaching beyond a clearly defined segment of the discipline. They oppose a somewhat differently shaped orthodoxy, which disregards the cultural constitution and contingency of economic life. This criticism applies also to culturally thin accounts within critical IPE. A closer look at the engagement of each volume with ‘its’ orthodoxy reveals the buried links between critical and cultural IPE.

Critical International Political Economy revolves around a non-positivist philosophy of science, which expresses the volume’s fundamental opposition to IPE pursued conventionally.

⁵ John Ravenhill, ‘In search of the missing middle’, *Review of International Political Economy* 15, no. 1 (2008): 18–29.

True to their at least post-positivist stance⁶, the contributors value ontological and epistemological inspection over narrow standards of methodological ‘rigour’. In this spirit, Bruff laments ‘the lack of rigorous reflection on the concepts we use’ (81). The theorising, which is structural or ideational⁷ (or a combination of both), is informed by the use of non-formalised qualitative methods, such as the dialectical reading of key texts. Repeated references to Cox (who is cited in most chapters) are indicative of efforts to expose the deceptive objectivity of non-critical takes on the global political economy. Lucian M. Ashworth (26, emphasis in original), for example, writes about Cohen’s historiography: ‘To paraphrase Robert Cox, history is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose’. The contributors’ redefinitions of conceptual vocabulary are linked to their shared objective of countering the reification of IPE as consisting of two poles with no intellectual life elsewhere. Apart from deconstructing seemingly neutral terms (such as ‘knowledge’ or ‘production’), they question widely accepted dichotomous ontologies (such as ‘national’ vs. ‘international’ space or ‘state’ vs. ‘market’).

It is essential for critical IPE to apply alternative understandings to empirical problems. Critical researchers understand scholarship as a holistic enterprise geared towards global emancipation: one that begins with ontological reflection, extends into the epistemological realm and entails an amended view of the empirical record to promote alternatives to the political status quo. Their foremost contribution lies in questioning not only what we take the global political economy to be and what we believe to know about it (Griffin, esp. 43 against this ‘taken-for-grantedness’), but also how we go about shaping our own future in it (Worth, 119). As Penny Griffin’s chapter vividly demonstrates, an ontological engagement with orthodox IPE necessitates a dissection of its ‘knowledge base’. Only once the ontological and epistemological ground has been prepared can IPE undertake empirically rich work on the ‘relations of exploitation, domination and force’ (Griffin, 47). Critical scholars concur that only those who dare to become political in their analyses can credibly challenge orthodoxy. Otherwise, research would stay trapped in the reproduction of knowledge that we hold now just because we have once known or assumed certain things.

Cultural Political Economy subscribes to a similar set of non-positivist core assumptions but does not position itself in direct opposition to orthodox IPE. This general foundational

⁶ Della Porta and Keating identify four ontological and epistemological approaches (in increasing order of subjectivism): ‘positivist’, ‘post-positivist’, ‘interpretivist’ and ‘humanistic’. Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, ‘How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction’, In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, eds Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19–39.

⁷ Craig Parsons, *How To Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chs. 2, 4.

orientation buys into specific ideational explanations to make intelligible the intersubjectivity of cultural workings in both their constitutive and contingent dimensions. The contributors employ similar qualitative methods about as non-‘rigorously’ as the contributors to the other volume, though we find a bit more diversity in the kinds of methods that the culturally minded scholars use to pursue their analytical interests. For example, while Eric Helleiner relies on archival records, William Walters studies a selection of maps. A major point of divergence is the highly variable degree of proximity to critical scholarship expressed in the chapters. Whereas Helleiner’s exudes little affinity with the emancipatory project of critical IPE, almost all the others (notably, those by Davies, Walters, Lisle, Amoore and de Goede, and Ouellet) appear sympathetic to such normative ambitions. Yet none of them details the nature of these overlaps – a point to which I return below. Ultimately, it is the focus on cultural expressions of the global political economy that unites the chapters.

Cultural political economists favour a more subtle engagement with orthodox approaches than do their critical colleagues. Their critique of – and, indeed, considerable opposition to – orthodox IPE is elaborated nowhere in Best and Paterson’s volume but surfaces in the collected analyses. Casting a wider ontological net, cultural IPE scholars take issue with reductionist accounts of the dynamics between the cultural, the political and the economic (esp. Walker). In their view, disciplinary knowledge cannot be a good guide in the search for accurate empirical pictures whenever ‘... the economic is contained, neutralized, displaced and in some cases made invisible’ (Walters, 118), or either of the other two is ‘relegated to mere effects or some other ephemeral or even adjectival status’ (Walker, 226). Their purpose is thus to (re)activate knowledge about that which has been de-economised, de-politicised or de-culturalised. In short, a cultural lens on the global political economy requires a balanced treatment of all of its three components.

The overarching commonality of critical and cultural IPE is their understanding of the social sciences. Both take non-positivist ontological and epistemological stances; both promote holistic understandings of the global political economy that break with the notion of methodological individualism; and both display a strong preference for qualitative – quite frequently hermeneutic – methods. Essentially, there would be enough common ground worth exploring. The cultural political economy of Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum is a prominent example of fruitful interaction between the two ‘C’ strands.⁸ Many chapters in Best and Paterson’s volume would indeed lend themselves to a transformative scholarly agenda. However, contrary

⁸ Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum, ‘Pre-disciplinary and Post-disciplinary Perspectives’, *New Political Economy* 6, no. 1 (2001): 89–101.

to the editors' intention, the conversations between cultural and critical works are all too often left un(der)specified in the individual chapters. What remains distinctive about cultural IPE is its greater ontological openness, which translates into an ambivalent attitude towards the nature of (global) capitalism (for example, Thrift, 217). There is even less recognition of culture as an analytical category in Shields, Bruff and Macartney's volume (cf. Germain, 62). As a result, neither volume reconstructs the links between critical and cultural IPE.⁹

Another striking – and still more unfortunate – similarity between the two volumes is their limited ability to overcome underlying ethnocentric tendencies. A post-racist¹⁰ reading of the volumes, via Hobson and Blaut, exposes critical IPE's reluctance to tackle its own Eurocentric beliefs and cultural IPE's indecision to break away from Eurocentric themes. This dearth of 'alternative critical post-racist imaginings'¹¹ needs to be of concern to all IPE scholars, not only to those who define themselves as critical or cultural political economists, for two basic reasons.

First, Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies are common in both contemporary IPE and classical political economy. Hobson champions the post-racist critique of Eurocentrism in political theory and historiography, including 'the Eurocentric foundations of IPE'¹². For Hobson, Eurocentrism comes in a 'manifest' or 'subliminal' form. It is hardly surprising that Eurocentrism characterises pro-imperialist theories; after all, global empires are built manifestly on declarations of civilisational superiority. The more spectacular finding is that anti-imperialist approaches, such as critical theory, retain Eurocentric elements; their 'metanarratives' subliminally elevate Western European and North American experiences to the civilisational benchmark.¹³ The decisive move of rendering visible 'Eastern' agency, reasons Hobson, can be best accomplished with research that prioritises 'everyday' (or bottom-up) activities between civilisations over 'elite' (or top-down) activities between nations.¹⁴

⁹ Attempts to combine the two strands have taken various forms: Andrew Sayer, 'For a Critical Cultural Political Economy', *Antipode* 33, no. 4 (2001): 687–708; Rosalind Gill, 'Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies', *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7, no. 1 (2014): 12–30; Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin, 'Economics, postcolonial theory and the problem of culture: institutional analysis and hybridity', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 33, no. 6 (2009): 1153–67.

¹⁰ John M. Hobson, 'Is critical theory always for the white West and for Western imperialism? Beyond Westphalian towards a post-racist critical IR', *Review of International Studies* 33, no. S1 (2007): 91–116, esp. 103–105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹² John M. Hobson, 'Part 1 – Revealing the Eurocentric foundations of IPE: A critical historiography of the discipline from the classical to the modern era', *Review of International Political Economy* 20, no. 5 (2013): 1024–54.

¹³ Hobson, 'Is critical theory always for the white West and for Western imperialism?', 95–103. For a general overview of Eurocentrism in IPE theories, see 'Part 1', 1033, Table 1.

¹⁴ John M. Hobson, 'Part 2 – Reconstructing the non-Eurocentric foundations of IPE: From Eurocentric "open economy politics" to inter-civilizational political economy', *Review of International Political Economy* 20,

Second, the micro-level Eurocentrism in IPE mirrors resilient macro-level ideologies of European superiority. Blaut unpacks the system of implicit beliefs that sustain ‘Eurocentric diffusionism’, the notion that Europe as the ‘Inside’ (‘centre’) of the world ‘diffuses’ innovative ideas to the ‘Outside’ (‘periphery’). A wholehearted anti-diffusionist, Blaut considers such a unidirectional worldview to be in utter disregard of the impact of the landmark year 1492: Europe became the Inside only after reaping the material benefits from its colonial conquest of America.¹⁵ Although all contributors would certainly reject every single item on Blaut’s infamous ‘checklist’ of Eurocentric beliefs¹⁶, each volume implicitly prioritises Western experiences. Despite the laudable ambition to challenge conventional narratives about the global political economy, neither expressly discards the assumption of ‘a vast periphery that changes as a result (mainly) of diffusion from that single center’.¹⁷ The troubling inference from Hobson’s and Blaut’s critiques is that it is difficult to investigate ethnocentric beliefs ‘out there’ critically as long as similar beliefs remain rooted in a discipline’s knowledge base.¹⁸ A few examples from the two volumes shall illustrate these ontological and epistemological limitations.

Critical International Political Economy does not address ethnocentrism from its anti-foundational stance. It is a notable omission for a critical volume to pay such scant attention to ‘the enduring, largely unconscious Eurocentrism of European and North American knowledge production’¹⁹ in economic matters (cf. Griffin) and beyond. A case in point is Bruff’s deconstruction of the reified state-market distinction without an appreciation of the ethnocentric appeal of such terminology. Similarly, Worth’s salvation of critical IPE from the ‘British school’ navigates safely through non-Eastern epistemological terrain. Even Griffin’s otherwise ethno-relativist analysis stays silent on the politics of Eastern resistance that Western interpretations of the global financial crisis might provoke or thwart. Given their fervent opposition to orthodox IPE, it seems paradoxical that the contributors are unable to undermine

no. 5 (2013): 1055–81, here 1075–6. Note that, for this reason, the ‘I’ no longer signifies ‘international’ for Hobson. Cf. John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke, ‘Everyday IPE: revealing everyday forms of change in the world economy’, In *Everyday Politics of the World Economy*, eds John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–23.

¹⁵ James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1993).

¹⁶ James M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2000), 200–2.

¹⁷ Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model*, 13.

¹⁸ Very similar foundational limitations plague International Relations research. Amitav Acharya, ‘Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 619–37; Robbie Shilliam, ‘Race and research agendas’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2013): 152–8, here 155–6.

¹⁹ Jane Pollard and Michael Samers, ‘Islamic banking and finance: postcolonial political economy and the de-centring of economic geography’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 3 (2007): 313–30, here 324.

the ethnocentric foundations of the discipline. Indeed, they are so immersed in their confrontation with orthodox IPE that introspection becomes a lesser priority.

Cultural Political Economy fares slightly better in terms of the charge of Eurocentrism. This assessment is still unflattering for scholars who pride themselves on delivering ‘culturally attuned’ insights but then conceal the agency of the East on the global stage. This bias is somewhat mitigated by an anti-diffusionist theoretical discussion of the relation between Self and Other by David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, and empirical applications in some of the following chapters. In examining the construction of an embedded economy, Rob Aitken brings to the fore not Eastern agency itself but at least its visual representations as part of the British imperial orbit. Debbie Lisle portrays ethical tourists as the main carriers of agency, but through their actions opens our eyes to ‘the entrenched power relations of cultural difference’ (153) in global tourism. This broad pattern repeats itself throughout the volume: The contributors do not acknowledge the continuous co-production by the West and East of the global political economy. By substantiating how the West constructs its Other, they at least emphasise how arbitrary yet always powerful information and knowledge can be.

Their foundational limitations make the two volumes complicit in the perpetuation of the ethnocentric underpinnings of the discipline. In Hobson’s terms, critical and cultural IPE share an anti-imperialist agenda that suffers from subliminal Eurocentrism and an underestimation of its prevalence in IPE. In Blaut’s terms, IPE’s Eurocentrism is a disciplinary expression of diffusionism, the subconscious ideological legacy of European colonialism dating back to 1492. The Eurocentric elements in critical and cultural IPE blur the neat disciplinary map that the analogy of the parliamentary polity suggests. As IPE’s extra-parliamentary opposition, critical political economists are reluctant to expand on topics where there might be more profound metanarrative similarities with the mainstream than they wish to admit. As IPE’s parliamentary opposition, cultural political economists adopt less a dismissive than a corrective strategy, which enables them to uncover ethnocentric themes accepted among many of their colleagues, orthodox or not.

Evidently, the analogy serves as no more than a heuristic device that captures the approximate positions of critical and cultural IPE within a diverse field. Definite demarcations ask for the impossible: given significant commonalities and overlaps, such as in Jessop and Sum’s research, the analogy breaks down at some point even if we discount the immense diversity within both critical and cultural IPE. As shown above, a notable point of breakdown is the critical IPE’s greater ethnocentric proximity to orthodox IPE. It is then perhaps less surprising that most critical scholars endeavour to transform the discipline from within, rather than to

overturn it from the outside like an extra-parliamentary opposition. I should also caution that the analogy itself is a deeply culturally inflected choice, the result of processes of everyday and scientific socialisation, which are never easy to escape, let alone shake off. All I can do within the scope of this review article is to alert us to the importance of disclosing and grappling with the ethnocentric leanings in our own scholarly activities – in my case the inclination to generalise from a representative parliamentary democracy.

A final caveat regards the problematic notion of ‘orthodoxy’ with its potential for strategic misuse. ‘Orthodox’ can be employed either as a self-congratulatory label by those who possess ample institutional power (as in Cohen’s historiography) or as a derogatory label by those who chide certain viewpoints as conventional (as in Cammack’s critique of Cohen’s historiography). What the term means and to whom is permanently defined, contested and redefined. Shields, Bruff and Macartney’s volume settles for a more rigid meaning. Its deliberate disciplinary positioning creates an interesting twist on its own criticism of the transatlantic divide as equating IPE with ‘orthodox’ IPE: the volume runs the risk of reifying ‘critical’ IPE by conceiving of it exclusively as an extra-oppositional force. Thus, disciplinary stock-taking encounters a fine line between necessary self-reflection and obsessive ‘navel-gazing’.²⁰

Conclusion

The study of the global political economy benefits from intellectual contestation. Like in politics, an opposition worthy of its name devises alternative modes of thinking about pressing issues. How well do the two volumes reviewed here fulfil this elementary task? Allow me to restate the three main points that stand out for studying and teaching IPE from a plurality of perspectives.

First, both volumes advocate a thorough rethink of received wisdoms about the global political economy. Numerous plausible reformulations underline the need for teachers and students of IPE to scrutinise their foundational convictions. Their combined effect is a constant reminder that how scholars conceptualise the global political economy influences what they can possibly find out about it. Through their own limitations, the volumes inadvertently reinforce the need for careful reflection about chosen ontological and epistemological avenues from which empirical analyses take off.

²⁰ Eric Helleiner, ‘Division and Dialogue in Anglo-American IPE: A Reluctant Canadian View’, *New Political Economy* 14, no. 3 (2009): 377–83, here 377. Also Elias, 100.

Second, both volumes form a benign opposition regarding the dominant ethnocentric foundations of the discipline. It is deplorable that their ‘heterodox recasting’²¹ remains incomplete for a lack of committed ethno-relativist recasting. By and large, they continue to cast the East as an object of Western action, not as a collective actor in its own right. Shields, Bruff and Macartney’s volume does not use its transformative potential to transcend these orthodox foundational confines. Best and Paterson’s volume is at least more cognisant of the resultant misrepresentations, but as a whole ultimately falls short of demolishing ‘the trope of Eastern passivity and Western hyper-agency’²².

Third, each volume seems to outline a distinct ‘C’ version of IPE. On closer inspection, however, many among their readers might ask how critical and cultural IPE relate to each other. A clearer delineation of their commonalities and differences would help to negotiate the boundaries of this vast but insufficiently charted IPE territory. The diversity within each strand is already extensive. The stimulating volumes attest to this internal diversity while hinting at overlapping research agendas. For the two ‘C’ strands, bridge-burning may become as important as bridge-building.²³ To clarify which ‘C’ they are talking about, critical and cultural political economists should debate more openly which bridges to build and which to burn between them.

²¹ I borrow this term from Magnus Ryner, ‘Financial Crisis, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in the Production of Knowledge about the EU’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012): 647–73.

²² Hobson, ‘Part 2’, 1066.

²³ See Mark Blyth, ‘Torn Between Two Lovers? Caught in the Middle of British and American IPE’, *New Political Economy* 14, no. 3 (2009): 329–36.