Toward a Post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and Critical International Relations Theory

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Abstract

This article explores the possibilities of the emergence of a genuinely “post-Western,” and less Eurocentric, “critical” international relations (IR) theory through a brief examination of “critical” discourses within two “non-western” cosmopolitan traditions: Islam and Sikhism. It is argued that, although critical IR has created space for the articulation of post-western discourses within the discipline, it continues to speak for and to the West. A genuinely “post-western” critical IR would seek to go beyond mere mimicry of the “derivative discourses” of the modern West by identifying critical discourses on the political from within non-western traditions. First, “Islamist” discourses on the Umma which are simultaneously critical of the varying forms of “Kemalism” and “neo-fundamentalism” prevalent in the Islamic world will be briefly examined. Second, critical perspectives on Sikhism which critique the derivative “politics of homeland” and re-assert the sovereignty of the deterritorialized, transnational community of believers, the Khalsa Panth, will be considered. It is argued that, like the Muslim Umma, the Khalsa Panth, offers us an alternative conception of universality—and a potentially more “solidarist” conception of international society—than that offered by western Westphalian IR.

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