



CHAPTER 16

Alternative Approaches to International Relations

This chapter discusses the main alternative approaches to IR, namely Socialism, critical theory, constructivism, feminism, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory. The contribution of key thinkers is appraised, and their strengths and weaknesses are assessed. Due attention is paid to variations within each broad tradition (e.g., the diverse approaches of feminist IR scholars are addressed). The chapter concludes with the observation that to think of the world around us is always to do so from within a given set of assumptions about the world. Theory is therefore not an abstraction from the world, but rather a way of both framing and shaping the world.

Chapter Outline

- **Socialism**
- **Critical Theory**
- **Constructivism**
- **Feminism and Gender Theory**
- **Postmodernism/Poststructuralism**
- **Postcolonial Theory**
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Anarchy
Authoritarian
Bourgeoisie
Colonialism
Critical theory (CT)
Dependency theory
Emancipation
Enlightenment

Globalization
Hegemony
Imperialism
Institutions
Liberalism (IR)
Metanarrative
Modernity
Patriarchy

Postcolonialism
Postmodernism/
poststructuralism
Realism
Constructivism
Sovereignty
Statecraft

Discussion Questions

1. Is it accurate to say that when it comes to international relations, Marxism is dead? Why or why not?
2. If the constructivists are right, and social order is an ongoing human production, then why does it seem so difficult to change the way states relate to each other?
3. Does the postmodern distrust of metanarratives necessarily lead to relativism in international politics?
4. Is the consideration of gender issues important in the study of international relations? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
5. What are some of the ways in which colonialism has changed Canada? What does that history mean for Canada's role in the world today?
6. How do gender politics within masculinity influence world politics?
7. What does the metanarrative of the war on terror mean? What can we gain by reviewing narratives of war?

Further Resources

- <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=713>
Collection of articles written from critical theoretical and postmodern or poststructural perspectives
- <http://genderandsecurity.org/>
Home page for The Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights
- <http://www.theory-talks.org/2008/04/theory-talk-3.html>
Transcript of an interview with constructivist, Alexander Wendt

- <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>
Full text of Lenin's *Imperialism* from marxists.org
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ziGZCE7fC8>
Former Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard's "Misogyny Speech"
- <http://www.wikigender.org/wiki/gender-and-international-relations/>
Gender and International Relations, Wikigender