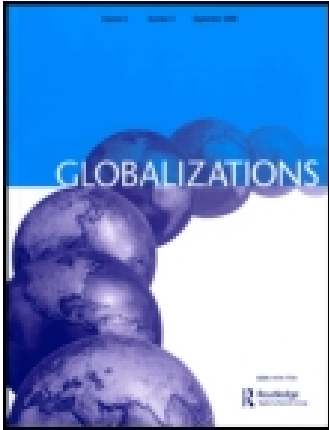


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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

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Dialectics has remained an underutilised analytical tool in international relations (IR) and across the political and social sciences more generally. This Special Issue of the journal *Globalizations—Dialectics and World Politics*—provides a necessary redress to this significant gap, offering scholars a useful resource for deploying dialectics in their own research and showcasing how dialectics can be an effective approach for understanding and transforming world politics. While there has been a widespread suspicion held against dialectics, its reception has been particularly cold in American IR scholarship, given its association with Marxism. This hostility has been a great hindrance to its acceptance, given that the orthodoxy of the discipline gravitates around this centre. Exaggerated by Cold War hostilities, such ideological mystification should, however, no longer cloud the benefits that can flow from dialectical thinking. The aim of this volume is nothing less than to reinvigorate dialectics in the so-called intersubjective turn in IR theory, a period that should make the discipline, now, more than ever, potentially receptive to this dynamic approach. For given the fundamentally interactive character of world politics, dialectics—with its focus on contradictions, relations, and change—seems especially well suited to IR's subject matter and its dynamic approach a spur for looking at our subject in a different and transformative manner. Dialectics offers a unique approach to world politics by focusing on: particular phenomena within the totality of social relations, the contextual analysis of the interconnectedness between such phenomena, and the immanent tendencies for social transformation that this engenders. This rehabilitation of dialectics is an important task that may yield impressive results in the study of IR, particularly regarding our ability to understand the processes of social change that are considered by dialectical analysis as something reliant on human agency rather than self-perpetuating systemic forces and which understands change as ontologically open-ended or 'possibilistic', rather than determined or teleological.

The volume demonstrates the fruitful, innovative, and diverse ways that dialectical thinking can be of benefit to the study of world politics by covering three thematic concerns:

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- (i) conceptual or meta-theoretical dimensions of dialectics,
- (ii) methodological features and general principles of dialectical approaches, and
- (iii) applications and/or case studies that deploy a dialectical approach to world politics.

Engaging across these thematics, the volume illustrates the conceptual, methodological, and practical elements of dialectical analyses of world politics that can be taken up in future research.

The volume does not claim to be an introduction to dialectics, nor that it could somehow offer a comprehensive account of the rich complexity of dialectical thought: dialectics spans a long history, the concept is itself essentially contested, and any attempt to cover all of its facets would be a monumental, if not impossible, undertaking (see Haug, 2005). What the volume does achieve, however, is to provide a forum for a diverse range of dialectical approaches on key issues in world politics, from global security to postcolonial resistances, from the theoretical problems of reification and complexity, to the study of the global futures and the intercultural historical expressions of dialectics. By canvassing such a broad array of ideas—inclusive of scholars critical of aspects of dialectics—the volume draws attention to the extraordinary benefits of thinking dialectically, that is, in thinking beyond the *appearance* of world politics to its *actuality* (Hegel, 1975, p. § 131). In this way, the volume retains the *critical* and *revolutionary* essence of dialectics that Marx (1986, p. 29) and many thinkers before and after him have held to be the core of dialectical thought.

In this volume, dialectics is not advanced as some fixed method, nor as a doctrinaire assertion of first principles. Rather, dialectics is viewed as a way of thinking through the relations, contradictions, and changes—the ‘messiness’—that permeates the social relations of world politics. The diversity of thought in each of the articles demonstrates a multifaceted and genuinely plural engagement with various dialectical approaches throughout the volume: from those focused on security and world order, to those concerned with postcoloniality and race; and from those involved in philosophical and historical development of dialectics, to those interested in case studies in IR. There is no conformity among the contributors on dialectics, other than their interest in and perceived effectiveness of dialectical approaches (broadly conceived). What unifies these seemingly disparate, and sometimes conflicting accounts, is that each highlights that dialectics offers a relational understanding of our world, far more than mere interconnectivity, but a unique ontological and epistemological approach into the social forces and contradictions that are generative of transformation in world politics and yet routinely downplayed in orthodox approaches to IR theory. In so doing, each chapter demonstrates how dialectics can be utilised more broadly in the discipline and its approach deployed in a critical fashion as part of an emancipatory project.

The volume begins with a Preface by Ollman (2014) who views dialectics as a combination of Philosophy, Method, and Practice. He then proceeds by dividing philosophy into ontology and epistemology; method into inquiry, self-clarification, and exposition; and practice into political practice and theoretical practice. He argues that it is only by combining all these elements into an internally related whole, where each of them is seen to require the others, that dialectics can be fully understood and used effectively in helping to change our world.

This introductory overview is further developed in my article (Brincat, 2014) that, initially, deals with some of the basic definitional and conceptual aspect of dialectics before offering a brief philosophical history of this idea. This history charts how dialectics has developed in Eastern and Western philosophy, from the *Yijing* and Dharmic traditions to the pre-Socratics and Plato; from the developments of dialectical thought in Western Marxism to the form of

Chinese Dialectics today. The article also details the far more modest engagements with dialectics that have taken place within IR theory. From this philosophical history, I then engage with some of the difficult meta-theoretical questions that face dialecticians in contemporary IR regarding the fluctuation between an evolutionary or relativistic idea of dialectics, that is, between understanding dialectics as a process of reflection and an objective logic traceable in human praxis.

Continuing with this intellectual development of dialectics, Cemgil and Teschke (2014) begin by identifying the problem of a persisting bifurcation in the field of IR theory between generalising IR theory and actor-specific Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which is replicated in the absence of FPA in extant versions of Marxist IR Theory. They proceed by clarifying two meanings of dialectics: its association with the monism of Dialectical Materialism, and the problems of a-historicism and de-subjectification within Systematic Dialectics. Rejecting these contending understandings of dialectics, they conceive of dialectics as a historical philosophy of praxis. Thus re-conceived, they suggest that dialectical thinking can bridge this gap between IR theory's prioritisation of macro-level phenomena and FPA's focus on micro-level processes as aspects of a single social-scientific undertaking. Cemgil and Teschke offer key insights into the nature of concrete dialectical analysis, emphasising the historical/processual and the intersubjective construction of social phenomena. This emphasis on historicity and agency allows them to re-conceptualise FPA as the concrete praxes of decision-makers in situated contexts, which purposefully articulate multiple domestic and foreign influences to non-derivable and historically specific effects. Thus reconceived, FPA is returned to the centre of Marxist IR theory, rather than relegated to a structural–functionalist outcome and epiphenomenon of deeper logics.

Engaging further with theoretical concerns, Cudworth and Hobden (2014) offer a sympathetic critique of dialectics from the perspective of complexity thinking. While they note many parallels between these approaches (including flux and social transformation), they also see distinctions in how they regard totality and contradiction. They also raise questions regarding teleology and anthropocentrism, arguing that complexity may enhance dialectics by providing a less restricted account of experience. These include, specifically, the analysis of a more expansive totality inclusive of the social and planetary; emphasising co-operation and co-evolution, rather than conflict; and looking to the relations between systems, feedback loops, and human and non-human systems (thus subverting any tendency to anthropocentrism). Such an approach, Cudworth and Hobden argue, could contribute much to IR, overcoming exclusions in human and non-human interactions, and thus reinvigorating the emancipatory impetus underlying both complex and dialectical approaches.

Turning to more historical and cultural engagements with dialectics, Levine (2014) uses a unique approach combining a critique of reification, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, and a sensibility he calls the *animus habitandi*, to engage contemporary Israeli security discourse. Interpreting Gershom Scholem's notion of an 'apocalyptic sting' through dialectics, Levine posits that Scholem is describing a process by which Hebrew's 'sacredness' complicates the emancipatory aims of Zionism: anticipating the rise of a particular kind of Israeli religious radicalism. Viewing reification as the tendency to forget the partial nature of concepts and the false identity of 'identitarian' thinking, Levine forwards the *animus habitandi*—a sensibility that accepts this vulnerability and abides in complexity and indeterminacy. For Levine, this may help advance a critical IR-realism by negating tendencies towards metahistorical narratives that reify the world, to instead move to a reflexive analysis based on Adorno's notion of constellations: changing and juxtaposed elements rather than essential, core principles.

L. H. M. Ling and I (Brincat & Ling, 2014) continue these cultural explorations of dialectical thought via a dialogue between Hegelian and Daoist dialectical approaches to world politics.

Taking inspiration from Plato and Laozi, we situate our dialogue between the two mutually related poles of being/nothingness in Hegelianism and *yin/yang* in Daoism, positing that these help understand how and why systemic change unfolds over time and across space, in theory and through practice. The dialogue focuses on some of the key divergences regarding contradiction and complementarity, leading to further debate between, on the one hand, harmonising, Othering, and the possibilities of difference without alienation, and on the other hand, recognition (master/bondsman), relations of difference, and *aufhebung* (sublation). Despite these differences, we find a deeply held, shared concern within ‘double transition’ (i.e. Hegelian sublation) and Daoist ‘difference without alienation’ (i.e. *yin-within-yang*, *yang-within-yin*).

Bringing in colonial and racial analysis to bear on dialectics, Agathangelou ([forthcoming](#)) uses Fanon as a means to disrupt the foundational corporeal and racial fetishisms that the ‘global’ order depends. Engaging with Hegel, Sartre, and Fanon’s discussions of the slave and the master, Agathangelou argues for the need for a new body, a new language, and new humanity. For her, the dialectic must be opened to another life that does not require the slave’s enslavement, or the killing, or colonisation of the Other. She reads Fanon’s work as exposing the fiction/s about the corporeality of anarchy and order as based on a stereotype of the black and the slave: the black formed and deformed by the subject/the white master; the presumption of blacks as sources of *anomia* (lawlessness) and *akosmia* (disorder). This became a ‘predestined depository’ that determined political thought. While Agathangelou agrees that Fanon ‘assumed’ a reciprocal relationship in Hegel’s dialectics, she posits that he also sought thinking along with Sartre to rupture the logic concept of the slave and the black as objects of a false history, as bodies enslaved and colonised by Eurocentricity. The importance of dialectics is not which narrative of it is true, but what it allows us to imagine. For Agathangelou, if we want humanity to advance a step further, then we must invent beyond the zones of the sovereigns and racial ‘masters’. Here, Fanon systematically exposes the Western and European foundational fantasy of ontological difference, a segregation that began with the enslavement and colonisation. For Agathangelou, ultimately, decolonial struggle and anti-colonial revolution are necessary if we are to short-circuit history and the dialectic. Unfortunately Agathangelou’s paper does not appear in this Special Issue but will be published in a later edition of *Globalizations*. It will also be included in the edited volume of this Special Issue that will be published by Routledge as part of the *Rethinking Globalizations* series in 2015.

Turning to a dialectical analysis of history, Doyle (2014) presents the case for a new model of world-political analysis, one removed from Eurocentric assumptions towards a model of ‘inter-imperial’ dialectics that engages with both the interactions among empires and the interstitial relations enacted between, amid, and against them. Doyle focuses this widened historical method on empires because of their deep impact *and* expands the traditional focus from Europe and the US examples of imperialism, to periods before and after 1500, developing an inter-imperial analysis of both early Afro-Eurasian political economy and of the Westphalian settlement and later revolutions. This ‘inter-polity’ model of dialectics emphasises three dialectical processes—*state co-formation*, *infrastructural co-production*, and *systemic accretion*—revealing the intertwining of states, the world economy, and cultural institutions, in a dynamic history of co-constitution and conflict. Bringing in these vertical relations across the horizontal relations among empires, Doyle offers an account of the microphysics of power, positionality, and interaction within the inter-imperial situation *and among* both state and non-state actors. This leads to a new assessment of revolutionary change and imagination of de-imperialisation, allowing Doyle to position inter-imperial political economy with a non-Eurocentric critical history that promises much for grasping the dialectical forces *co-constituting* empire and resistance.

Biersteker (2014) advances his synthetic approach developed through the Dialectics of World Orders Project. Deploying an open-ended dialectical orientation, Biersteker offers both a historical and contemporary analysis of the three global, doctrinal debates in global security in the twentieth century. Biersteker's approach is holistic, taking into account multiple perspectives and uses debate and dialogue as central to analysis. It assumes that change and contradiction are central to social life, and seeks to understand these processes as the result of internal and external factors, and material and ideational forces. For each period and debate, Biersteker examines the internal logic, inner workings (rules and practices), and internal contradictions of the security system, any alternative security orders, and the contradictions pertaining to these doctrines. The first period focuses on the competitive European, Great power balancing system; the second follows the rise of the UN as revised system of collective security and the Cold War power balancing system between the USA and USSR; and the third on the Unipolar period (or 'moment') defined by American hegemony and contestation over intervention, sovereignty, and response to threats. Biersteker shows that balance of power and collective security dominated twentieth-century security debates and yet that the periods of transformation were neither immediate nor inevitable, and that there were, and are, always recessive competing world order alternatives immanent within existing systems.

To close the volume, we have a future-oriented engagement with dialectical thought from Heikki Patomäki (2014). Drawing on ideas from critical realist philosophical dialectics, Patomäki explores Karl Polanyi's concept of the 'double movement' in the context of contemporary global political economy—asking the question whether society, on a planetary scale, is bound to protect itself against the 'stark utopia' of self-regulating markets. Arguing against a pendulum model of modern history, and going beyond the simple thesis-antithesis-synthesis pattern, Patomäki uses various dialectical conceptions and schemes to propose better hypotheses for explaining past changes and for scenarios about possible and more or less likely future changes. As the domain of the real is larger than the domain of the actual, he focuses on political economy contradictions and tendencies as well as on normative rationality. Patomäki argues that democratic global Keynesianism would enable processes of decommodification and new 'syntheses' concerning the market/social nexus. Furthermore, he suggests that Camilleri and Falk's notion of holoreflexivity—that at the heart of human civilisation is a learning process towards qualitatively higher levels of reflexivity—can help develop global transformative agency. Patomäki believes that existing contradictions can be resolved by means of collective actions and building more adequate common institutions, but these collective actions are likely to involve new forms of political agency such as world-political parties. World history must remain open, however. Democratic global Keynesianism will generate lacks, problems, and contradictions of its own and will be followed by other possibilities.

This project was very much inspired by the work of Hayward R. Alker with the hope of building upon his legacy and rich array of work in furthering dialectics as an approach to IR theory. This project came about through a number of informal discussions between some of the authors at international conferences, beginning at the SGIR 7th Pan-European International Relations Conference (Stockholm, 9–11 September, 2012) and the ISA 53rd Annual Convention (San Diego, 1–4 April 2012). It soon became apparent that there was a groundswell of interest in dialectical approaches to world politics heralded by a number of important publications in this area, and the ongoing interest in the pioneering work of Alker. It became equally apparent that there was a need for a shared forum for those scholars interested in dialectics who were otherwise

working with these approaches independently. Subsequent panels at ISA 55th Annual Convention (Toronto, 26–29 March 2014) and the WISC 4th Global International Studies Conference (Frankfurt, 6–9 August 2014) were successful events where papers of this Special Issue were first presented. This groundswell of interest will continue with a roundtable including some of the authors contributing to this volume addressing the Presidential Theme at ISA 56th Annual Convention (New Orleans, 18–21 February 2015).

I would personally like to acknowledge Barry Gills for his long-standing support of this project, as well as the editorial board of *Globalizations* for seeing the potential in this area of scholarship. I would also like to thank Martin Weber, Damian Gerber, Thomas Biersteker, and Nicholas Onuf for their assistance with a number of questions that arose during the project. All of the contributing authors have worked for a number of years on this project and I thank them for their commitment over such a long period. This project would not have been possible without a committed pool of reviewers who would otherwise receive public thanks for their dedication but whose hard work must remain anonymous.

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