


## Political Economy, Markets, and Institutions

# Race and Identity in the Study of International Political Economy

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## Global Perspectives

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Introduction to **Race and Identity in the Study of International Political Economy**  
Global Research in International Political Economy (GRIPE) Webinar and commentaries  
Organized 30 September 2020

On June 10, 2020, the #ShutDownSTEM movement called for an academic strike, as part of a much broader effort to combat anti-Black racism. Stephanie Rickard, Peter Rosendorff, and I had launched the [Global Research in International Political Economy \(GRIPE\) webinar](#) a few weeks earlier, in hopes of offering scholars a chance to connect with one another during a time when conferences and travel were suspended. The webinar met weekly, with political scientists presenting new research in the areas of comparative and international political economy. We hoped that, even while many of us were not making much progress on our own research and writing, we could nonetheless form a virtual community of scholars. We also recorded and posted the sessions, with an aim of including those in far-off time zones. And it seemed that the series could be especially useful to scholars whose institutions did not have regular, in person speaker series.

In the context of the call to action, though, it was abundantly clear to us that our subfield of political science—international political economy (IPE)—was not doing nearly enough to grapple with race and racism. To be sure, many (if not all) of us had been involved in conversations about how to improve diversity and inclusion among faculty as well as graduate and undergraduate students. But while IPE has made progress with respect to gender representation in its ranks, its level of racial and ethnic diversity remains strikingly low. The explanation offered is often a longer-term, structural one: many departments state that they would love to hire a more diverse set of faculty, if only the set of new PhDs (or even current doctoral students) were more diverse.

But this “pipeline” logic begs the questions of why people of color do not, in many cases, choose to pursue graduate study; why graduate students of color often do not study international political economy; and whether (and why) the pipeline is leakier for people of color. While “diversity and inclusion” alone is far from enough, who is at the table—who is attracted to and encouraged to study IPE—no doubt affects the questions that are asked, the answers that are offered, and the extent to which certain top-



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ics are deemed “important” or “interesting.” This raises the issue of who enters our field: what would attract undergraduate and graduate students of color to study IPE? Would they find a field that pays serious and sustained attention to race, as something that matters for trade policy, capital flows, and foreign aid? Or might they find, for instance, that our frequent focus on material factors—which flows directly from mainstream economic models of trade and finance—is accompanied by a lack of attention to racial and ethnic identities, and to how these identities interact with, mediate, or help create materialist demands?

Here, it is useful to note that the GRIPE webinar, while aiming to involve scholars from around the world, typically features work with a so-called “open economy politics” focus. While the field certainly has evolved since Lake’s (2009) review and critique of it, open economy politics focuses on interests (of voters, firms, investors, and government actors); pays attention to how these interests are aggregated

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through domestic and international institutions; and explores how ideas shape—but, even more, are shaped by—interests. The international level often generates effects that reverberate within countries, in “second image reversed” fashion (Gourevitch 1978). Work in this broad tradition employs a range of empirical methods, but statistical analysis of quantitative data features prominently.

Three things about this approach are notable. First, because this approach typically does less analysis at the level of the global system, it may be less inclined to treat race as a structural, enduring feature of international politics and the global economy (see, for instance, Shilliam 2018). That is, one could view the emphasis on agency as one that deemphasizes structural power (and see Loken and Zvobgo 2020 on how mainstream international relations theory also has paid insufficient attention to race). Second, interests typically are defined in material terms; individual and collective actors’ preferences over policies reflect their anticipated income effects. As such, open economy politics may pay less attention than it should to cultural factors—something that many in the field grapple with as they seek to understand the recent successes of populist parties and antiglobalization appeals. Third, to the extent that scholars in this tradition favor quantitative over other forms of analysis, “race” and “identity” may seem more difficult to operationalize and, therefore, less likely to gain attention. (But see Sen and Wasow 2016 on research designs treating race as a “bundle of sticks.”)

These attributes can make our field far less appealing to—and perhaps less hospitable to—scholars interested in questions of race and identity. To the extent, for instance, that one is analyzing how race and colonial histories affect interactions between debtor governments and creditor representatives, one would not find much of help in the political economy of sovereign debt literature. Yet, at the individual level, there is compelling evidence that race affects access to credit (e.g., Greiner and Rubin 2010). Or, to the extent that one wants to study how racial dynamics affect the framing of foreign aid projects to audiences in donor countries, one also might find IPE scholarship lacking. These significant gaps not only make our field less welcoming to some scholars and scholarship; they also make our analyses poorer and less complete (Lake 2016).

It was in this context, therefore, that we organized a roundtable on “Race, Identity and Culture in International Political Economy.” We invited five scholars of comparative and international political economy to speak briefly on how they had incorporated race and identity into their research, as well as how they planned to do so. We also asked them to note what gaps in our scholarship become evident when race is explicitly considered. (Participants were Andy Baker, the University of Colorado Boulder; Alexandra Guisinger, Temple University; Kathleen McNamara, Georgetown University; J. P. Singh, George Mason University; and Pavi Suryanarayan, Johns Hopkins University). And, in the discussion after these presentations, we asked audience members to reflect as well on how we—as journal reviewers,

editors, instructors, and graduate advisers—define work as “good” or “interesting” and how these judgments might discourage attention to the role of race and identity in our field.

We hoped that this roundtable would generate a longer-running conversation, as well as substantive changes, in our field. We are pleased that Maha Atal, Gina Yanitell Reinhart, and Rachel Wellhausen continue this conversation via the more extensive commentaries in this symposium. We also welcome other recent initiatives to treat race more centrally, especially the [Mortara Center’s Global Political Economy](#) project. We hope that greater and sustained attention to race will improve not only the appeal of our research communities for scholars of color but also the quality of our research on trade, populism, fiscal policy, finance, climate change, and the like.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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Layna Mosley is Professor of politics and international affairs in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, as well as the Department of Politics. Her research and teaching focus on the politics of the global economy, as well as international relations more broadly. Some of her work examines the effect of multinational production and global supply chains on workers’ rights in developing countries, as well as the ways in which U.S. trade policies might affect workers’ rights abroad. With respect to labor rights, she also is interested in efforts at private sector governance, such as the Bangladesh Accord on Building and Fire Safety.

Another stream of Mosley’s research focuses on the politics of sovereign debt, and on how professional investors evaluate and react to political institutions and government policy choices. In the current era of financial globalization, these market reactions sometimes limit democratically-elected governments’ ability to meet the demands of their citizens. She also investigates how low- and middle-income governments manage their relationships with creditors, including how they decide whether to borrow from commercial banks or bond investors, and how they market themselves to potential bond buyers.

Mosley is a member of the Executive Board of WomenAlsoKnowStuff, and a co-organizer of the Global Research in International Political Economy (GRIFE) webinar series. Prior to joining the faculty at Princeton in 2020, Mosley was Professor in the Department of Politics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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