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We need to talk about silence: Re-examining silence in International Relations theory

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Introduction

One of the most enduring critiques of the field of International Relations (IR) theory in the last 30 years has been that it is replete with silences. Silence, according to the critique mounted by established theoretical and meta-theoretical paradigms in critical IR scholarship, is associated with corporeal and epistemic violence. Groups identified as affected by silence are women, post-colonial (racialised) actors and those disempowered as a result of the current process of neoliberal globalisation. At the intersection of these groups, one finds a final group: the (female) subaltern who, according to Gayatri Spivak (1988: 83), ‘has no history and cannot speak ... is even more deeply in shadow’.

In the discipline of IR, analyses of silence are a direct result of cross-disciplinary pollination, which took place at an expectedly slow pace, for ours is the age of disciplinary specialisation. Their roots can be found in the fields of literary theory, psychoanalysis, sociology and history among the works of those scholars who either adopted the deconstructive epistemology of postmodernism or the materialist critique of hegemony found in the work of Antonio Gramsci, or both. Some of the most well-known works to emerge as a result are: Michel Foucault’s (1967) study into the structured and eventual confinement of the ‘insane’ to silence; Luce Irigaray’s (1985) investigation into what constitutes a ‘woman’, where she concluded that ‘woman’ does not have a voice of her own due to the work of patriarchy; and Edward Said’s (1995) study into the co-construction of the ‘Occidental Self’ and the ‘Oriental Other’.

These works have influenced critical IR scholars, whose dissenting voices, seeking to reveal and undo silences, have not quietened down as time has passed. Instead, they have been multiplying, with silence continuously invoked as a problem for the practice and understanding of international politics (Bhambra and Shilliam, 2009a; Booth, 2007; Enloe, 2004; Guillaume, 2013; Hansen, 2000). For example, in the 2014 International Studies Association’s (ISA’s) Annual Convention, there was a panel entitled ‘Silence, (In)Security, and Agency in Feminist Research’ and there were

no less than 12 papers with ‘silence’ in the title. In the 2015 Annual Convention there were three panels on silence and 14 papers with ‘silence’ in the title. However, despite the term’s popularity, little effort has been made to unpack the implications of existing definitions of silence. Furthermore, no effort has been made to evaluate the effects of theorists’ efforts to rid the worlds of theory and practice of silences.

This article seeks to fill this vacuum by addressing these, so far, neglected aspects of the existing literature. It is divided into three sections: the first two focus on the matter of conceptualisation and the final one focuses on the amelioration of silence. The first section examines the most widely accepted definition of silence, which equates silence with violence and oppression. It suggests deepening this conceptualisation, integrating in it an understanding of the aesthetic dimension of experience. The second section interrogates

the assumptions that underwrite the current discussion of silence in the discipline, arguing that we should broaden our understanding of silence. The third section analyses the implications of current attempts to ameliorate silence in theory and practice. In the case of theory, it argues that due to the nature of social understanding, we should accept that a degree of silence will exist in all interpretations of international politics. Similarly, it argues that we must accept that all political orders necessarily include a degree of silence that cannot be wished away. Even though these conclusions may appear to be anathema to those of us concerned with silences in international politics, it is argued here that accepting the permanence of a degree of silence serves to reawaken us to the burden and possibilities of practical politics. Finally, the conclusion applies the arguments made in the main body of the article to the situation in Yemen since the country’s unification to illustrate how these arguments can help us interpret and address silence in this marginalised state.

Silence as violence: Deepening the conventional definition

In its conventional definition, silence is identified as the complete absence of sound and a state of abstaining from speech. When silence is used by IR theorists, it not only denotes the absence of speech, but also implies that this has been a result of violence, whether direct or indirect (Galtung 1969, 1990), whereby ‘human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations’ (Galtung, 1969: 168). An example of this is Ken Booth’s (2007: 160) argument that ‘all silences are “against some body or against some thing.”... [emphasis in the original] Such silences are not natural, they are political.... The silent in world politics are not physically voiceless: they are politically silenced.’ This argument, typical of the

literature on silence (see Bhambra and Shilliam, 2009a; Booth, 2007; Enloe, 2004; Hansen, 2000), illustrates that silence is a phenomenon associated with violence, and thus disempowerment and disenfranchisement.

In Booth's and in similar works, silence is a multilayered phenomenon seldom disentangled. It is argued here that we can disentangle this most widely accepted conceptualisation of silence by incorporating into our analyses Galtung's delineation of the types/ dimensions of violence. According to Galtung (1969, 1990), violence has three dimensions: direct, structural and cultural. Direct violence — physical or psychological — is committed at the expense of one person by the purposive action of another person. Structural violence (Galtung, 1969: 170–171) is the result of the unequal distribution of power and its origins cannot be traced back to a person. Rather, it is built into the structure and manifests itself as unequal life opportunities. The final type of violence is cultural or symbolic violence, defined as 'those aspects of a culture ... that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence' (Galtung, 1990: 291). The effects of direct and structural violence are manifested materially/corporeally, whereas the effects of cultural violence are illustrated when we interrogate ideational structures.

Critical IR scholars are mostly concerned with the last two types of violence, which refer to the violence committed against groups, whether political groups, like the citizens of specific marginalised states such as Yemen, or groups presumably united by their perceived identifying characteristics, like women, people of colour and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Some theorists, Booth included, do focus

on individuals; however, the majority are preoccupied with disenfranchised groups and the means by which they are disempowered and their disempowerment is perpetuated. Critical IR has been concerned with structural violence, in the form, for example, of the material structure of the global capitalist system, as well as with the culture that legitimises the disempowerment that this and similar structures perpetuate (see, e.g.,

Agathangelou and Ling, 2009; Booth, 2007). In the case of IR, the culture in question is made up of connecting discourses and could be summarised as being primarily Eurocentric, patriarchal and secular, with liberalism as its defining ideology. Its pervasiveness is evident since it is espoused by such demonstrably different actors as the neoliberal hawks of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the cosmopolitan doves of liberal feminism who inadvertently helped legitimise the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, it should be noted that this culture has a language,

English, which has come to dominate the realm of knowledge production due to the workings of British colonialism and US hegemony. As Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya (2007) show, this has prevented the voices of the Global South from being heard in IR, and beyond, thus creating a deep-seated silence that theorists are now attempting to combat.

Thus, it may be argued that silence indicates a twofold phenomenon in the work of critical IR theorists dealing with these interconnected violences: a function of structural and cultural violence (the act of silencing a group's voice in practice or in discourse); and an indication of their presence (the exclusion of the voice of a group from the political process or from discourse). Historically, IR theorists have been mostly focused on cultural violence and specifically on the violence present in the different discourses that make up the prevailing culture. This is because cultural violence, they argue, legitimises and thus, in part, creates structural violence. This argument is extended to silence, leading most theorists to focus on silences manifested as violent exclusions from powerful discourses. This is best exemplified in the work of Steve Smith (1995), who argues that the way in which we theorise about the international is constitutive of the practices of international politics. Thus, he implicates the discipline in practices that 'threaten, discipline and do violence to others' (Smith, 1995: 3). It is important to note that silences are not only absences; they are constitutive of political discourses and practice (Bhambra and Shilliam, 2009a). Thus, as indicated earlier, silences are exclusions. As Lene Hansen (2000: 306) argues: 'all speech involves an attempt to fix meaning, to define a particular situation and the subjects within it, and any successful speech act implies as a consequence the exclusion of other possible constructions of meaning'.

Despite the contribution to the literature of silence made by scholars like Smith, this article refrains from endorsing the purely discursive definition of silence found in the works of postmodernist IR theorists. This is because to adopt postmodernism's presuppositions would be to accept that 'political life can be adequately theorised in the single vocabulary of power' (O'Sullivan, 2000: 131). In turn, this leads theorists to argue that the best way to avoid creating more silences would be to refrain from prescribing a parallel research programme or paradigm (Ashley and Walker, 1990), and, more recently, that we need to concentrate on what we do not know (Grayson, 2010: 1016). These arguments seem to prioritise the ideational dimension of experience over the material, and to therefore be more concerned with disrupting established paradigms than with undoing structural — material and corporeal — violence. As such, they have been criticised by

other critical theorists who argue that the unwillingness of postmodern IR scholarship to inspire a politics of resistance reduces it to an esoteric intellectual exercise of little usefulness to those who are ‘burning in the hells of exploitation, sexism, racism, starvation [and] civil war’ (Agathangelou and Ling, 1997: 8).

Renouncing postmodernism’s arguments, which reduce all violence in the political to discursive violence, does not necessarily entail dismissing its warning about the danger of speaking for the silent. Instead, first, it allows the recognition that authority and legitimacy are important elements of the political dimension of experience, at least at the domestic level — if not at the international (Nardin, 1983). Second, it allows us to recognise the existence and appreciate the importance of the many regimes of truth manifested as different conceptions of the Good Life present in the international arena. Furthermore, it creates the preconditions that allow us to imagine other possibilities and to engage in and with politics. Therefore, it is argued here that the first step towards imagining other possibilities and engaging in and with politics is the recognition that the two dimensions of silence discussed in the literature are interrelated but not reducible to each other.

This article takes issue with a second aspect of the literature on silence: its lack of attention to the aesthetic dimension of experience. This dimension, according to Jacques Rancière (2004: 13), refers to the divisions of ‘the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determine the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience’. In other words, the aesthetic dimension determines what he calls ‘[t]he distribution of the sensible [that] reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed’ (Rancière, 2004: 12). According to Rancière’s analysis, disagreement is not a mere lack of understanding or comprehension, ‘[it] is a conflict over what is meant by “to speak”’ (Rockhill, 2004: 4). This conflict is significant for our conceptualisation of silence since it is manifested as the inability of those who have been silenced to ‘speak’ because their voices are either volume-less or unintelligible. Put succinctly, those who are silenced have *phonè* (from the Greek φωνή) or mere voice/noise, but not *logos* that would have made their voices intelligible and thus powerful (Honig, 2013: 143).

By incorporating Rancière’s arguments over the aesthetic dimension and its centrality in sense-making, we come to understand the deepest causes of silence. Thus, we can now better understand

the arguments forwarded in a recent essay by Egyptian author Youssef Rakha (2014), who writes about the frustration of having to dilute his views in order to make them intelligible to a Western audience:

So it must be something other than the physical conditions for speaking that's keeping me silent, and my sense is that thing is the unwritten rules governing civilized discourse in the world today (which I believe originate largely in America). Whatever else is involved, it is the Washington-centered unipolar world order's assumptions about what can and cannot be said that lie behind this encroaching dumbness: the possibility that my voice, or the pitch of it that counts, will be always outside your hearing range.

Rakha's essay illustrates the argument forwarded here because it shows that silence is not only the product of material disempowerment and fixing meaning, which results in excluding other experiences, but also the result of the current distribution of the sensible, which prevents the transmission of the thoughts, experiences and voices of the marginalised at any given time to the minds of those at the centre. This is not a mere exclusion because the practice of excluding someone or some thing implies a tacit recognition of their presence. For example, the exclusion of women's experiences from established IR paradigms did not mean that women were invisible; rather, it illustrated the establishment's thoughts on the significance of women's role in international politics. On the other hand, Rakha's account indicates that an even deeper exclusion exists that hinges on the refusal to even acknowledge that his point of view exists. This is not necessarily manifested in denying him the right to speak. Instead, it can be the outcome of the dilution of his point of view so that it may fit into the current distribution of the sensible. In the process, Rakha's voice is transformed from *phonè* into *logos* ; however, as he explains, his *logos* represents neither his intentions nor his experience:

Rather than trying to silence me, you force me to gently caress what I should be punching in the face. You insist on me abiding by discursive procedure at the expense of meaningful discourse. Either I soften and dumb down my uncivilized 'opinions' or else ... I altogether cease to exist. (Rakha, 2014)

The implications of Rakha's account, which illustrates Rancière's arguments about the importance of the aesthetic dimension of experience, is that silence as a phenomenon of cultural violence has

deeper causes than we have so far acknowledged. It does not just exclude experiences, but, rather, it denies their existence, making them inadmissible for consideration. Therefore, incorporating the aesthetic dimension into our analyses of silence adds an extra layer for our consideration that allows us to become aware of the limits of the sensible, both in our worlds and in international politics.

Such an awareness makes us receptive to the argument that the deepest consequences of the established Eurocentric, patriarchal, neoliberal and secular international political culture may be that it renders invisible and unheard those who, like Rakha (2014), refuse 'to lose depth and edge so [they] too can be gobbled up by "freedom"'. This serves to remind us not only that other conceptions of the Good Life, with their own distributions of the sensible, exist, but also that the one we inhabit may render them invisible to us. Therefore, it is argued here that the greatest consequence of incorporating the aesthetic dimension into our analyses of silence is that it creates the need for caution and the acknowledgement of our limits since we all exist within a specific distribution of the sensible that necessarily renders us blind and deaf to varying extents.

The preceding discussion arguably serves to clarify and deepen the predominant conception of silence in IR. It disentangles current definitions, arguing that delineating between silence manifested in structural and cultural violence is necessary to avoid discussing silence solely within the remit of postmodernism, which masks important aspects of the political. Despite the fact that this argument opens the way for an engagement with practical politics, it was deemed limited by its inattention to the aesthetic dimension of experience. Thus, it was argued that the aesthetic dimension of silence should be incorporated into current conceptualisations, allowing space for new investigations into the phenomenon.

Problematising and broadening the current conception of silence

Disentangling and deepening our understanding of silence according to the preceding discussion leaves the presuppositions that underwrite the literature unaddressed. This section problematises the current conception of silence as a phenomenon associated with violence committed against certain groups by interrogating its presuppositions. Through a discussion of liberal feminist IR, this section identifies these presuppositions as: 1) a reliance on the essentialist construction of the identity of 'others'; and 2) a conception of agency tied to the liberal project. This section interrogates the implications of basing our conceptualisation of silence on these presuppositions, which become

most evident when a group is described as silent. It does so to make the case for a radical re-conceptualisation of silence in IR that will broaden our understanding of the phenomenon to incorporate its different modalities.

This discussion starts with the work of Cynthia Enloe, who is credited with compelling us to ask ‘Where are the women?’ in our analyses of international politics. Enloe explicitly refers to silent groups numerous in her work. For example, she argues that women at the margins are:

so naturally marginal, silent and far from power that exactly how they are *kept* there could not possibly be of interest to the reasoning, reasonable explainer. A consequence of this presumption is that the actual amount and the amazing variety of power that are required to keep the voices on the margins from having the right language and enough volume to be heard at the centre in ways that might send shivers up and down the ladder are never fully tallied. (Enloe, 2004: 22 [*emphasis in the original*])

Here, it should be noted that, in her work, Enloe does not assume that all women are marginal, agency-less and voiceless. It is those at the margins who are silent. Enloe’s concern with the silence of marginalised women is also exemplified in her seminal *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (Enloe, 2000), where she examines the workings of the global (sex) tourism and agricultural industries and the role of sex work for military bases, among other subjects. She thus exposes the centrality of keeping women disempowered in sustaining global inequalities. Her book is methodologically informed by the desire to challenge the presupposition that the public and private realms are clearly delineated in the international arena. This delineation, she shows, is one of the central strategies sustaining the silence over the effects of ‘marginalised women’s’ oppression in mainstream IR. Her conclusion reflects this intention when she boldly proclaims that ‘the international is personal’, thus necessitating ‘a radical new imagining of what it takes for governments to ally with each other, compete with and wage war with each other’ (Enloe, 2000: 196).

Enloe also offers a solution to the problem of silence manifested as structural violence. However, this is much vaguer than her strategy for eliminating discursive silences. She states that to undo this silence, we need a ‘feminist international campaign’ (Enloe, 2000: 18). Such a campaign may start from our attentiveness to the work of groups of women who meet to analyse some of the problem areas that Enloe (2000: 201) discusses. Further, she argues that in doing so, we may need to

dismantle the theory–practice divide. Crucially, in Enloe’s formulation, women would be better placed to undo silences, cultural and structural, due to their experience of the workings of gender.

Feminist IR has been attentive to the workings of gender and race discourses in keeping marginalised women silenced. Theorists working in these areas have come to conclusions less vague than Enloe’s call for a ‘feminist international campaign’. Earlier in the history of feminist thought theorists like Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981) argued that we should privilege women’s knowledge since their experience as mothers compels them to be empathetic, loving and responsible, qualities which can help transform politics. Later on, attentiveness to the constructed nature of gender led theorists to argue that to end the structural violence, and thus the silence, against women, we should aim for a politics not dominated by ‘masculinized metaphors’ of power and conflict (Parpart, 1998: 206). Perhaps the most comprehensive answer to the problem of women’s marginalisation, especially in the periphery of international politics, has been offered by Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum (1999; 2000) compiled a list of ten essential human capabilities that should be universally protected and allow women (and men) to enjoy fulfilled lives while freeing them from any obstacles and violences visited upon them as a result of the structures imposed by outmoded traditions.

Despite the noble intentions of liberal feminist scholarship, it is argued here that identifying the absence of voice solely with violence contributes to the construction of further silences in IR. This is a result of the presuppositions that underwrite this identification and the discussion of silence in the literature at large. One may interject that identifying silence with violence, as Enloe does, is a useful simplification allowing us to target an important problem area in international politics. However, this article argues that assuming that silence is only a phenomenon associated with violence is underwritten by teleological presuppositions, associated with liberalism, which may allow theorists to deny that the silent have agency. This may also allow us to take the liberty of acting as a ventriloquist for the silenced group, thus silencing it further.

In the case of liberal feminist IR, ‘marginalised women’ is a silenced group whose uniting characteristics are sex/gender, followed by race and class, and ultimately the oppression that its members suffer. The practice of analysing international politics from the standpoint of a specific group is not peculiar to feminist-inspired critical scholarship. For example, post-colonial theorists have often written about ‘post-colonial’ actors, or ‘the subaltern’, in similar ways. This practice is

not problematic in and of itself; some form of simplification in the form of the utilisation of categories is to be expected. Problems ensue when the constructed character of these simplifications is not adequately acknowledged.

One may plausibly argue that Enloe (2000: 199) unlike Elshtain (1981) before her, does acknowledge that the experiences of women differ, along with their opportunity to act in the political arena, thus negating this argument. This is certainly true when it comes to women who may be marginal in comparison to men but have some power and agency, usually the result of their race, class and state of origin. However, when discussing ‘marginalised women’, Enloe’s argument is open to the accusation that she presumes that this is a homogeneous group unable to speak due to the structures that render its members completely voiceless. This, perhaps inadvertently, implies that Enloe assumes that ‘marginal women’ or ‘subaltern women’ is a rational transparent agent with an understanding of itself as being silenced, whose position is homogeneous and who is the basis of social relations (Mouffe, 1993: 75; Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 101). Taking this position to its natural conclusion may then allow theorists to argue that the members of this group may plausibly be united in their desires and choice of action. This understanding is implicit in Enloe’s work where she promotes *an* international feminist campaign and asks us to pay attention to the activism of women who address the issues she is concerned with. This is shown in the following to be a position that is difficult to maintain.

First, this line of argument rests on the assumption that gender identities are the only or the primary identities taken on by agents in the international arena. This point has been made by Hansen (2000: 287) in connection to security, where she argues that the security dilemmas that women face are silent because they ‘often involve an intimate inter-linkage between the subject’s gendered identity and other aspects of the subject’s identity, for example national and religious’. Her argument highlights the inseparability of gender based threats from national, religious and state security, and serves as a much-needed reminder that subjects’ identities are multifaceted.

Acknowledging that women’s gender identity may be ‘subsumed’, to borrow Hansen’s expression, by other aspects of their identity does not automatically mean that any opportunity for political mobilisation and action aimed at addressing silence and the problem of violence becomes meaningless or impossible; quite the contrary. On the other hand, insisting on prioritising gender identities and subjects’ oppression limits the possibilities for political action. The antidote embraced

here is the anti-essentialist formulation of the social agent as made up of a number of ‘subject positions’ among which there is no essential correlation and that exist in constant flux. This argument, forwarded by Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe (2014: 101–108) and Agathangelou and Ling (1997: 29–32), among others, provides an effective counterbalance to the inadvertent essentialism that may be found in critical IR. Such a position, Mouffe (1993: 74–89) argues, does not necessarily lead to the political paralysis often associated with anti-essentialism. Instead, it can lead to the establishment of a chain of equivalence among subordinate groups who can unite through the shared identity of radical democratic citizens and coordinate in organised action. Furthermore, embracing this anti-essentialist thesis can also enhance and aid our understanding of political movements that do not conform to the liberal narrative of progressive politics, such as the Egyptian mosque movement famously studied by Saba Mahmood (2012), to which I will turn shortly.

The final problem found in feminist IR’s utilisation of silence arises from the depoliticisation of the international arena that follows these arguments. This is clearly evident in Enloe’s work, who in seeking to identify the silent and awaken us to their plight, reverses the public–private division of the political. Enloe’s methodology allows her to be attentive to power when it is manifested in the private lives of marginalised women, oppressing them and diminishing their opportunities. However, in reversing the public–private distinction and being solely concerned in her own work with the violence manifested in ‘marginalised women’s’ private lives, Enloe ignores that ‘[t]he specific political distinction to which political action can be reduced is that between friend and enemy ... [It] denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation’ (Schmitt, 1976: 26). Enloe’s inattentiveness to the political dimension — the dimension where intractable conflicts over the Good Life manifest themselves, along with the workings of authority and legitimacy — leads her to wrongly argue that we may understand conflict between states by following her methodology and conclusion.

Inattentiveness to the political dimension of experience is also evident in Parpart’s work when she presumes that the inclusion of feminine actors in the international political arena would lead to a collaborative and inclusive politics and undo the domination of ‘masculinized metaphors’ of power and conflict (Parpart, 1998: 206). This argument demonstrates a naivety associated with teleological dreams that aspire to the end of all

silence and violence. It is argued here that this should be tempered by the recognition of the perpetuity of power and conflict and the abandonment of the dream that the inclusion of the oppressed can free us from their differences.

This article returns to the depoliticisation of the international that many theorists concerned with silence fall foul of. For the moment, we return to the issue at hand: the presuppositions that underwrite the association of silence with violence and its subsequent use as a descriptor of specific, homogenous groups. It is argued here that one of the main problems that arise is the (mis)representation of these groups as agency-less. Casting a group as voiceless, or as only having *phonè* but not *logos*, permits the theorist to play the role of ventriloquist, being free to impose on their subjects their own ideas of what constitutes empowerment and emancipation. This imposition produces an even deeper silence on the group that one intends to make visible and heard. A second, related problem is that this strategy, in tandem with the associated claim that the oppressed group suffers from the effects of false consciousness, may lead the theorist to despise the very people that they seek to empower.

We can see these problems most clearly illustrated in the realm of activist politics. In the past year, the radical feminist group FEMEN has been staging naked protests against what they argue is the subjugation and domination of women who are either required or chose to wear a burqa , niqab or hijab . Their most stringent critic has been a group of Muslim women who have formed an opposing group, Muslim Women Against FEMEN. FEMEN's initial response was to argue, through their leader Inna Schvechenko (in Gordts, 2013), that these women 'write on their posters that they don't need liberation but in their eyes it's written "help me"'. This response initially serves to illustrate that Schvechenko and FEMEN take the actions of Muslim Women Against FEMEN to be the result of false consciousness. Subsequently, when some Muslim women spoke, FEMEN's ears received their voices as *phoné* , not as *logos* , since their experiences and subsequent articulations remain outside the Eurocentric, secular and liberal distribution of the sensible that FEMEN inhabits. In this way, FEMEN perpetuates silence in its oppressive form since its secularism and liberal ideological underpinnings give its members permission to ventriloquate. Furthermore, the preceding episode illustrates FEMEN activists' feelings of contempt when 'Muslim women' failed to act or speak as FEMEN expected.

The example of FEMEN is certainly extreme but it serves to highlight the logical conclusion of arguments that identify silence with lack of agency. Here, one may interject that feminist literature in the last few years has addressed these issues by expanding our understanding of silence. For example, Parpart (2010) argues that it is no longer adequate to equate voice with agency and empowerment, and silence with oppression

and disempowerment. She calls us to pay closer attention to the material and discursive conditions that determine who can speak, and argues that, in these conditions, silence and secrecy may indicate strategies for survival (Parpart, 2010: 17–21). Furthermore, silence may be an expression of ‘empowered choices/agency for women in an often masculinist, dangerous and conflict-ridden world’ (Parpart, 2010: 16). This, one may argue, should be enough to put to bed any objections about the current conception of silence since it has been broadened to include silence in its mode as survival and in its mode as resistance. The last point is further supported by the proliferation of works that focus on silence manifested as resistance, most famously utilised by Mohandas Ghandi (Baxi, 2009: 253) and, more recently, in Turkey during the 2013 Taksim Square protests (Verstraete, 2013).

However, this article argues that Parpart’s latest intervention serves to further illustrate the problems identified earlier. Her treatment of silence as a survival tactic may be a welcome addition, recognising the agency of the silenced, but it is nevertheless a further iteration of the argument that silence, whether chosen or imposed, is an indication of violence and oppression. Further, it is argued here that the argument that silence indicates resistance, also made recently by Xavier Guillaume (2013), exemplifies that agency is only recognised if it is manifested according to the expectation of the liberal project. This is a charge mounted against liberal feminism’s project in general by Saba Mahmood, whose work serves to highlight the harmful consequences of basing our conception of silence on essentialist constructions of identity and agency reflective solely of the liberal political project.

Mahmood (2012: 155) argues that for liberalism in general, and liberal feminism in particular, no ‘valuable forms of human flourishing’ outside the liberal imaginary exist. In the *Politics of Piety* (Mahmood, 2012: 15), she challenges the assumption that all people, irrespective of their cultural and socio-political background, desire freedom and liberty. As a result, she argues that feminist scholarship ignores those modalities of agency that cannot be understood through the lenses of resistance to discourses and practices of patriarchy (Mahmood, 2012: 153). Instead, Mahmood

(2012: 15) demonstrates that desires other than that for freedom and liberty, including the ‘desire for submission to recognized authority’, do exist. Thus, she effectively shows that agency is exhibited not only in resisting existing norms, but also in inhabiting them.

This is a nuance that escapes Parpart since, in her work, ‘Muslim women’ are constructed as a monistic group whose agency is only understood in reference to their presumed desire for freedom. Their agency is thus manifested by subverting current hegemonic norms, including the structure of patriarchy and colonialism. Thus, in Parpart’s (2010: 22) work, contra FEMEN, ‘Muslim women’s’ choice to wear a headscarf is interpreted as an act of resistance to colonialism. In coming to this conclusion, Parpart escapes the dangers entailed in associating silence solely with violence but fails to take into consideration that suffering, passivity, docility and submission are all modalities of agency that may manifest themselves as silence. As a result, she imposes her understanding over the self-understanding of the actors she studies, thus silencing them further.

It may be argued that silence as a phenomenon associated with inhabiting hegemonic norms is not widespread, and that the move towards broadening our understanding to include this may be thus less useful than this article suggests. On the contrary, the argument for broadening our understanding, it is argued, is further strengthened if one considers the meaning behind often-used proverbs like ‘söz gümüş se sükut altındır’ (Turkish proverb: ‘Speech is silver but silence is gold’) and الصمت حُكم و قليل فاعله (Arabic proverb: ‘Silence is wisdom and the silent are few’). These proverbs illustrate Mahmood’s argument by showing that silence is a phenomenon associated not solely with violence and resistance, but also, for example, with spirituality. Further, they indicate that this modality of silence is manifested widely. Indeed, silence is manifested in similar ways in modern Western culture, where, as Susan Sontag (2009) notes, art has become the vehicle of spirituality while silence has become central in modern artists’ quest for transcendence.

This article argues for a radical re-imagining of silence in IR. This should take place through the rejection of the presuppositions that have so far limited our understanding of this complex phenomenon. This new conceptualisation should reject essentialism and liberal teleology and abandon the sense of certainty that they create. Instead, it should be based on a recognition of the inherent pluralism of our world, thus recognising, as Nicholas Rengger (2013: 4342) argues, ‘the plurality and distinctiveness of our different selves and ... of our different societies and the distinctive engagements to which they also give rise’. This will permit us to broaden our conception

of silence by recognising that it is a phenomenon of many modalities, to borrow Mahmood's language. Some of these have been recognised in the existing literature: silence as a function or indication of structural and cultural violence and silence as resistance or a strategy for survival. Others, not so far acknowledged, are silence as spirituality, docility, suffering and active collusion with existing norms. As a result of deepening and broadening our interpretation of silence, it is suggested that our understanding of this phenomenon and of the international political system as a whole may become richer and more complex.

Eliminating silence as violence?

Despite how one may respond to the argument that we should adopt a pluralist understanding of silence, the preceding discussion may appear to be superfluous since it does not address how to respond to silence manifested as and in violence. Indeed, no discussion of silence in IR would be complete without addressing this issue. Here, it is argued that the adoption of a pluralist and political conception of silence is a necessary first step in discussing how to eliminate silence because it sets the parameters that attempts to do so should abide by. In other words, it is suggested that we may start evaluating attempts to eliminate silence as violence by questioning whether they recognise the plural and political nature of the international order, along with the limitations that this recognition entails. This section discusses attempts to eliminate cultural and structural silences separately.

I start here with meta-theoretical investigations attempting to ameliorate the violent silence imposed on the experiences of others in the dominant discourses that permeate the discipline of IR. These investigations take several forms that could be characterised as purposeful engagements with and in heterology — the study of difference (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: 15). This has been undertaken by critical IR scholars across the board from postmodernism (Grayson, 2010) to feminism (Tickner, 1992) and post-colonialism (Acharya and Buzan, 2010; Jones, 2006; Tickner and Blaney, 2012). Arguably, the most concerted attempt to transform IR into a discipline engaged with heterology has been undertaken by post-colonial scholars who have sought to establish a non-Western school of thought characterised by a concern with forces, movements and civilisations rather than states, and by its focus on collectivism rather than individualism (Puchala, 1997). Other associated efforts include uncovering the implications of non-Western thought (Pasha, 1997; Yaqing, 2007) and of other understandings of already-established concepts like human rights (Bhambra and Shilliam, 2009b).

One such attempt is that undertaken by Giorgio Shani (2008: 727), who exposes silence in IR by reminding us that the rational, secular, liberal, 'Western self' presupposed by IR was constructed in opposition to the 'Islamic other'. By deconstructing the other who has been silenced, Shani recovers an alternative to IR's notions of community. He argues that the Muslim community of believers, the umma, is 'emphatically, not a nation-state: rather it is an association of Islamic societies which share the same thick values and seek to integrate them in social and political life' (Shani, 2008: 729). He does not offer an essentialist analysis of the umma ; instead, he concludes that a post-Western IR will only be built in 'an engagement with the "thicker" cultures of the non-West' (Shani, 2008: 733).

These works reflect an awareness of the pluralism of the social order that we all inhabit, which was identified earlier as a precondition that all attempts to eliminate silences as violence must fulfil. Further, they acknowledge the danger of speaking for the silenced, reflecting the lasting impression of the works of Spivak and Said on contemporary critical theory. This awareness has pushed most theorists concerned with undoing discursive silences to practise constant reflexivity as part of their methodology. Reflexivity is a component that aims to provide an answer to the problem posed by Spivak (1988), who argued that the subalterns' inability to speak was based not so much on their physical inability to do so, but on our inability to listen. Now, we can see that the inability to hear and inability to listen (Nancy, 2007: 6) is not only discursively constituted, but also determined by the distribution of the sensible. One may argue that a commitment to the act of listening on the part of the theorist automatically entails reflexivity since 'to listen', according to Jean-Luc Nancy (2007: 6), is 'to be straining towards a possible meaning, and consequently one which is not immediately available'. Further, it is 'an intensification and a concern, a curiosity and an anxiety' (Nancy, 2007: 5). Thus, one may argue that the attempts to ameliorate discursive silence examined here are united in their character in their commitment both to reflexivity and to listening, as Nancy describes it.

Here, I would like to suggest an alternative way of addressing silence as a phenomenon of cultural violence in IR: adopting Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic-interpretive approach to the study of the social order. This is an approach opposed to positivist methodology, which, as Gadamer (2004: 484) has shown, does not grasp that human actions are expressions of intelligence that can only be interpreted if the element of tradition is taken into consideration. This approach recognises the

limitations to our understanding because it takes into consideration that the theorist is situated within a historical-linguistic, and, one may add, aesthetic, tradition that they cannot escape. As a result, as Michael Gibbons (2006: 567) argues, there ‘is no God’s eye perspective from which to survey the whole and put it completely at our disposal’. This approach, therefore, accepts that there may be multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of reaching a truthful conclusion, only that this conclusion will never be the final one (Gadamer, 2004: 363–371, 484).

Accepting Gadamer’s arguments about the appropriate study of the social order may free us from the fear that our voices inadvertently silence those who are disempowered because it entails a recognition that no account will ever be a final one, leaving space for the voices that our historical-linguistic and aesthetic tradition does not allow us to hear. At the same time, it unburdens us from the guilt that Spivak’s argument creates, which compels us, it seems, to constantly question our conclusions. This does not mean that Gadamer’s approach does not compel us to think reflexively or that it promotes an ‘anything goes’ approach to political research and theory. On the contrary, according to the postulates of the hermeneutic-interpretive approach, we must start by taking into account ‘the forms of moral evaluation of the members of the polity or the society we are studying’ (Gibbons, 2006: 569). To illustrate this point, Gibbons (2006: 568) offers the example of Islamism and argues that we may understand the actions of Islamists only if we take into consideration ‘that what might motivate some Muslims is the idea of Islam as an autonomous ethical–religious–political vision of the good life’.

This approach, it is argued, may free us from the burden of producing silence-free theories or studies, an impossibility given the fact that, as social agents, we are always situated in a tradition/culture that confines our comprehension. Further, it frees us from the paralysing guilt that this limitation might create. Simultaneously, it creates the preconditions for the promotion of interpretations of international politics in IR that acknowledge the existence of different conceptions of the Good Life, thus limiting silences. Finally, this approach is compatible with the interpretation of silence given in the previous section, which argues that silence is best understood as a phenomenon of many modalities. Silence may only be understood as such if we take into consideration the different conceptions of the Good Life that the agents we are studying inhabit.

Following this exploration of the world of theory, I turn to one of the most important attempts to formulate an alternative paradigm capable of addressing silence in its modality as violence in the world of practice: that put forth by Agathangelou and Ling's (2009) *Transforming World Politics*. Their methodology transcends positivism, relying on poetry, myth and theatre to formulate a theory of world politics based on what they called worldism and poiesis — from the Greek *poio* (ποιῶ), which means to create. As a theory, worldism acknowledges the plurality of the world and the multiple identities that we take on while we navigate it (Agathangelou and Ling, 2009: 1). This is a thesis inspired by the concept of poiesis, which allows one to see that 'worlds emerge from constant interplays, both interpretive and material, between selves and others. They create ceaseless, multiple constructions of being and becoming that transform familiar boundaries — material, geographical, capital, cultural, spiritual — into unfamiliar reconstructions of "we"' (Agathangelou and Ling, 2009: 91). Their work is thus predicated on listening to rather than just hearing the other, and recognising that international life is a result of multiple intertwinements. This serves as a point of departure that leads them to envision 'a worldist forum [that] would recognize, legitimate, and hold accountable multiple voices, subjectivities, traditions and discourses' (Agathangelou and Ling, 2009: 134).

The first underlying characteristic — by no means unique to the work of Agathangelou and Ling or to critical IR — that one can identify as a driving force of their work is a keen concern with victims. This underwrites the preoccupation of critical IR with silence and helps explain the effort that theorists like Agathangelou and Ling make to challenge the conditions that lead to victimisation. This preoccupation is a defining characteristic of Judaeo-Christian thought over the last two millennia. As Renè Girard (2013: vii–viii) argues:

[t]he most remarkable feature of our world is its loudly advertised repugnance for victimage. Even if our deeds do not match our principles, even if our record of persecution sharply contradicts our language ... the real essence of our Judaic and Christian heritage is the value that already united us all, at least in principle, the defence of all victims.

This vision is fundamentally different from the ancient Greek tragic vision, whereby nothing that happens does so for a reason. Those who are 'evil' are not always punished and one cannot expect redemption or to receive their due in this life or the afterlife. In Homer's *Iliad*, the Greeks and the

Trojans are equally heroic and flawed. Yet, many of them perished due to both their mistakes or fallacies and the whims of irrational ‘gods’ (Lebow, 2003; Steiner, 1961).

One of the dangers that the intrinsic concern with victims creates is that it may lead the theorist who aims to end victimisation to disregard the place of violence in, what Girard calls, human culture. Victimage, as Girard argues, is the result of unappeased violence, which leads a society to ‘scapegoat’ a surrogate victim in order to avoid violence being vented on its own members (Girard, 2013: 4). If left unappeased, violence ‘will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area’ (Girard, 2013: 10). In Girard’s analysis of social relations, which is informed by a tragic sensibility, violence and victimisation appear to be fundamental ingredients of human society. Indeed, one may argue that this understanding of violence may, in part, account for the wars of nationalism and ideology of the last century. On the other hand, in Agathangelou and Ling’s (2009) argument, violence is almost exclusively linked with neoliberal strategies and the discourses and practices of fear and property. As a result, it is possible for them to imagine, at least theoretically, a silence-free and violence-free order, which, at the formal political level, may take the form of a ‘worldist forum’.

It is difficult to deny the strength of Agathangelou and Ling’s (2009: 86) worldist analysis, and one has to consent that the worldist politics of ‘daily life’ that they forward may become crucial in grounding and uniting projects of resistance to the current neoliberal order. However, this vision cannot provide an adequate blueprint for the creation of a sustainable silence-free order. There are two reasons for that: first, that disregarding the ineliminable tension and the quest for power in any normative political theory opens up the theory to the accusation of being apolitical ; and, second, that basing an order on the politics of worldism, as they describe them, would be imprudent. This is because, as Hume (1742) reminds us, in practical politics, it is prudent to suppose that people are only interested in personal gain in order to construct institutions that constrain power and safeguard liberties. Whether people are evil or good is irrelevant to Hume’s philosophy; what is relevant is the prudent construction of institutions of government so that they can check abuses of power. For those to be constructed, we ought to pretend that people are evil, when, in fact , this might not be the case. Similarly, in considering whether it is possible (and how) to construct a durable silence-free order, we cannot start from the assumptions that guide Agathangelou and Ling’s analysis. Instead, we should at least pretend that people are evil, that violence functions as Girard argues and that there are ineliminable tensions among peoples that may be intractable.

Chantal Mouffe, whose concept of agonistic politics shares many similarities with Agathangelou and Ling's arguments, grounds her formulation of an alternative, and potentially silence-free, political order in these assumptions. According to Mouffe, in agonistic politics, the enemy is turned into an adversary, the change implying that their right to exist is no longer questioned. The adversary, like the enemy, is excluded from a given political order because prudence dictates that all orders have to exclude those who seek to destroy them in order to survive. At the same time, the adversary is allowed to partake in agonistic debate (Mouffe, 1993). According to Mouffe, this model can give those so far excluded from the political order a stake and, most importantly, a voice in politics, thus preventing them from resorting to violence.

Agathangelou and Ling, like Mouffe, are interested in incorporating excluded voices into the political process. However, their theory lacks Mouffe's (1993, 2013) acknowledgement of the necessary exclusions that all orders are built on, whether the neoliberal imperium they criticise or the worldist forum they aspire to. This argument does not suggest that the more inclusive system they aspire to is equivalent to the current neoliberal arena. However, one may argue that it is similarly based on the assumption that all conflicts can effectively be settled, whether those over what constitutes the Good Life or the conflicts of nationalism and ideology that brought about the deadliest wars of recent times. Juxtaposing their work with Mouffe's reminds us that completely eliminating conflict and therefore exclusions is impossible.

Here, it should be noted that Mouffe's agonistic model, discussed earlier, is only appropriate for domestic politics. However, she recently attempted to extend it to the international arena. In this effort, she addresses issues important to critical IR theorists, like the notion of human rights, which she also seeks to 'rescue' from the cultural specificity imposed on it by dominant discourses (Mouffe, 2013: 28–32). In her latest work, *Agonistics*, Mouffe (2013: 23) argues that it would not be possible to institute a unified agonistic order on the international level because there is no political community on which to base such an order. Instead, she argues that in our 'pluri-verse', the cosmopolitan dream of pluralism without antagonism is impossible. Further, she argues that every order is hegemonic, at the same time acknowledging that hegemony under one superpower exacerbates conflict. Thus, she suggests that the best way to refrain from stifling or silencing pluralism while simultaneously restraining antagonistic conflict is the pluralisation of hegemonies, each based on agonism and able to keep each other in check (Mouffe, 2013: 22). Crucially, these

hegemonies would not be free from exclusions and their interactions would not be free of conflict. At the same time, Mouffe (2013: 22) contends that the order she envisions is agonistic because it 'acknowledge[s] the plurality of regional poles, organised according to different economic and political models, without central authority'. In light of the limitations and requirements that political life in general and international politics in particular present us with, it seems that aspiring to a pluralisation of agonistic hegemonies is the best we may be able to do in our quest to limit silence.

In trying to imagine the world otherwise and focusing on the politics of daily life, critical IR theorists have so far failed or refused to acknowledge the reality of power, conflict and ineliminable tension. This failure or refusal can, in part, be explained as a strategic or ideological choice in the service of transforming world politics. Nevertheless, this failure has resulted in theories that are open to the accusation of being apolitical and imprudent since they do not acknowledge the existence of existential violent conflicts that, paraphrasing Schmitt, represent the utmost degree of separation of political units. To avoid this pitfall, any hope of entirely eliminating silence by creating a completely open international order is dismissed here as politically naive. Recognising this entails leaving behind the dream of creating an ultimate order that will be free of conflict violence, power and exclusions. I reject the view that this qualified scepticism amounts to nothing more than cynical realism based entirely on power that completely defeats the purpose of exercises aimed at addressing and limiting silence in its mode as violence. Instead, I concur with Bonnie Honig (1993: 210), who argues that to accept the perpetuity of conflict is radically democratic because it is to 'reject the dream of displacement, the fantasy that the right laws or constitution might someday free us from the responsibility for (and, indeed, the burden of) politics'. This opens up the way for a renewed investigation into the possibility of creating the conditions that would allow the restriction of silence as violence to the bare minimum in a world of deep plurality and conflict.

Conclusion: Reinterpreting and addressing silence in Yemen

Through an exploration of how silence is defined and addressed in critical IR today and the implications of these practices, I have argued that we need to reformulate the way in which we understand this complex phenomenon. I also suggested that theorists concerned with ridding the world of theory from silence manifested as violence should consider adopting Gadamer's hermeneutic-interpretive approach. Finally, it was argued that we should narrow the scope we use to

discuss and imagine ridding the world of practice from silence as violence. These arguments derive from the awareness of the complexity and plural character of our world and of ourselves as social agents, as well as from the refusal to reduce the political to the moral. This may be interpreted as a reactionary argument that unduly constricts our ability to imagine the world differently. Here, I briefly seek to challenge this view while also illustrating how the arguments made in the previous sections can help us better interpret and address the current situation in Yemen.

It would be hard to dispute that Yemen has been silenced in IR theory. For most of us, our understanding of this small Arabian state is marred with references to state failure and terrorism, while its treatment in the academy as a whole largely reinforces the silence prevalent in popular discourse. IR's frames of reference are mostly unable to explain the rich and diverse social structures that define the lives of those who call it home. They also render us unable to diagnose or address the pathologies that permeate these structures (Dingli, 2013). Furthermore, the distribution of the sensible makes it hard to listen to the words of the veiled women standing at the podium speaking in favour of the popular Islamist party *Islah*, or to the weapon-clad tribesmen who participated in the Arab Spring, without superimposing our interpretations onto their actions.

In parallel, the majority of Yemen's population suffers from ruthless and unrelenting structural violence. This post-colonial state has been the focus of great power and regional rivalry since the 19th century. It exists at the margins of the capitalist world economy and has been subjected to the wrath of US power when its leadership refused to obey US instructions during the First Gulf War. It has also been subjected to IMF structural adjustment programmes, which, like the reorganisation of the domestic economy undertaken by the British colonial authorities before, had the effect of exacerbating already-existing problems, confining more and more people to economic hardship, and empowering the most corrupt members of society (Blumi, 2011). Its association with terrorism elevated Yemen to the status of national security threat for the US, leading the latter to subject the population to a campaign of violence visited upon them from the air in the form of drone attacks, while simultaneously strengthening corrupt politicians and reinforcing their practices. Currently, the population of Yemen is faced with silencing tactics perpetrated by combating centres of power whose leadership, whether in the US, Yemen or Saudi Arabia, shows no interest in asserting the dignity of persons or peoples (Mouffe, 2013: 30).

In light of the preceding analysis, the Arab Spring-style rebellion in Yemen that began in 2011 could easily have been interpreted as a rebellion of the silent whose voice now rose to demand the fulfilment of the ‘universal’ desire for liberty and freedom. Such an interpretation presupposes that the ‘Yemenis’ are a unified group whose agency may only be interpreted in light of the liberal project. However, the actions and words of those who participated in the rebellion reveal another story. The rebellion in Yemen may be better interpreted as an instance when a significant number of individuals with multifaceted identities — Southerners, women, tribesmen, the young and the unemployed — were united in their identity as dignified human beings to demand the removal of the oppressive regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Although some of the participants were motivated and acted in pursuit of the Good Life as this is conceptualised by liberalism (Nevens, 2011), others, including Nobel Prize-winner Tawakkol Karman, were motivated by different conceptions. In Karman’s case, we may infer that her conception of the Good Life is Islamic. However, this also needs to be qualified since her conception differs sharply from that of the Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), whose actions, including the failed terrorist attacks against Northwest Airlines Flight 253 and the numerous successful bombings against Yemeni troops, indicate that they, unlike Karman, do not care for the dignity of all human beings. Thus, the most appropriate study of such a complex phenomenon is a hermeneutic-interpretive one, which would take into consideration the self-understanding of the different agents who took part in the rebellion.

The rebellion was soon taken over by privileged members of Yemeni society, who benefit from the silence of the majority. On one side of this constellation, one finds tribal, religious, political and military leaders. The actions of these post-colonial actors before, during and after the event, which colluded with the aims of their Saudi and American sponsors, serve as a further warning against treating the silent as a unified group. This is because their actions have resulted in strengthening the global and regional norms that contribute to the structural violence committed against other post-colonial actors. On the other side of the conflict among the elites that, in some ways, preceded and followed the rebellion, we find AQAP and its affiliate Ansar al-Sharia, groups motivated from desires other than those valued by liberalism, as Christopher Swift (2012) shows.

Consequently, when considering what approach can best limit silence in Yemen, one is faced with several conundrums. The first is how it may be possible to establish an order that would limit the silence of Yemenis, and other disenfranchised actors at the international level, in a plural world and in the face of the absence of political community. Such an order, Mouffe (2013: 30) offers, would

necessarily have to be based on prudential agreement. Further, since it partly seeks to limit silence, and therefore violence, it must necessarily be based on the assertion of human dignity and accommodate the various forms that this takes. However, the case of Yemen presents us with a fundamental problem: how to treat those who do not comply with this rule because their conception of the Good Life distinguishes the worth of some humans over others or necessitates the destruction of others to be fulfilled. This problem may manifest itself in varying levels of intensity. One may argue that the case of AQAP is the most extreme since its leaders embrace jihad as an ethical struggle and embrace Bin Laden's strategy of attacking high-value targets all in the pursuit of their version of the Good Life (Swift, 2012). It could also be argued that the US embraces similar tactics to protect its hegemonic version of the Good Life, as evident in its treatment of Guantanamo detainees, a great number of whom are Yemenis (Marhia, 2013).

This impossible problem — a result of existential political conflict and of the unipolar structure of the international system — suggests that even the agonistic reformulation of the political order that Mouffe offers is too ambitious and asks too much of politics. This is because an agonistic order, even on the domestic level, assumes that it would be possible to create a consensus around the principles of democracy and liberty. I believe that the impossibility of the task of creating a consensus among groups with warring conceptions of the Good Life or with hegemonic aspirations, like AQAP and the US, leaves us with only one solution: to accept that a degree of silence will be a necessary part of any political order.

This recognition, I argue, is similar in spirit to the recognition of the impossibility of ever ridding the world of theory from silence. This argument, put into sharp relief by the discussion of the Yemeni case, highlights the need for humility in our study of silence in all its modalities and in our efforts to limit to the bare minimum silence's manifestation as violence in international politics and IR. It awakes us to the impossibility, as Honig argues, of ridding ourselves of the responsibility for politics and compels those dedicated to limiting silence's manifestation as violence to consider the ways in which we may engage in politics given our complex identities and the distinct conceptions of the Good Life that we hold.

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Notes

1. Here, it should be noted that, in their book, Agathangelou and Ling are mostly interested in forwarding a new analytical perspective and making a transformative intervention into existing discourses. This is where the strength of their argument lies. However, since their book is entitled *Transforming World Politics*, and in entertaining the possibility of a worldist forum, they open their theory to the questions raised here.

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