

## **A Critical Geopolitical Analysis of the Representation of Africa in International Relations: Andrew Linklater's Approach**

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### **Abstract**

The African continent has, to date, been mostly perceived as a “marginalized” geographical or geopolitical foundation and is represented in international relations (IR) so narrowly in the definitions provided by classical geopolitical knowledge or hegemonic knowledge of international relations. Nevertheless, efforts must be made by intellectual and practical elites worldwide for a more realistic representation of the opportunities and potentials of this continent by relying on conceptual-theoretical formulations. To address the main question of the relationship between Africa's geopolitical position and its conceptual and theoretical representation within the discipline of International Relations. The author suggests examining the pathology of conceptual-theoretical formulations in International Relations (IR) and Geopolitics. This requires a new reading of critical geopolitics drawn on the works of Andrew Linklater, which can provide more basic explanatory ideas with the critique of epistemological foundationalism, state-centrism, narrative-based approach, and nature of the disciplines. This paper is a theoretical research that proposes a new conceptual framework. It adopts an explanatory-critical analytical method to explain the theoretical approach of global critical geopolitics. The results of the paper emphasize that the theories and texts of IR and Geopolitics must be reviewed and reformulated with innovative evaluations centered on the position and role of Africa in the international history of the world. It highlights the importance of considering the distinct lived experiences of the continent which can serve as a basis for developing a methodological, epistemological, and ontological research program for participation in global politics and non-western international relations.

**Keywords:** Africa and International Relations, Representation, Critical Geopolitics, Andrew Linklater's Critical Theory, Historical Metanarrative.

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### **1. Interduction**

The field of International Relations typically defines Africa by the competitions between major powers on the international stage during the classical and neoclassical colonial periods and its geopolitical position in international politics. The endpoint of chronicling African international relations and its status in IR texts is also influenced by the views of those who have formulated its present position. Furthermore, the mainstream researchers of IR are inclined to marginalize African studies and the region's performance within the hierarchy of global values as insignificant. Consequently, as the literature Geopolitics shows, particularly the classical version, assuming the marginalization of Africa in International Relations has also been extensively taken for granted.

The absence of Africa, like West Asia, in the texts of theoretical formulations and academic developments in Geopolitics is in essence a disregard of in the formulations of "texts" in IR studies. Why has Africa, like West Asia, not been considered when formulating the core paradigms, ideas, theories, and main studies in texts of IR studies? Why has Africa been perceived merely as a challenge and danger to the Western world, relegated to the margins of the discipline? Why is Africa missing in all the conceptualizations and theoretical formulations of the IR, which is centered on the historical experiences of international relations?

Addressing these theoretical questions, it must be acknowledged that previous efforts by critical geopolitics as an approach formed by critical postmodernist ideas have been monumental and welcomed by IR and Geopolitics analysts in many areas, including current phenomena such as wars, national security, and crises (Ashley,1987; Dalby,1996; Dalby,1991; Ò Tuathail,1996; Najafzadeh and Talebian,2023; Malek Mohammadi, 2014). However, the theoretical approach of the present paper aims to offer more dynamic theories and metatheories in terms of epistemology, narrative studies, and major assessments. This approach provides a multidimensional perspective on evaluating the relationship between the geopolitics of a country or continent and its conceptual and theoretical representation.

Research has also been conducted to investigate the reasons behind the present representation of Africa in geopolitical and IR texts. For instance, Dunn and Shaw, editors of the book "Africa's challenge to international relations theory", argue that Africa is an ignored region in dominant IR theories without theoretical or empirical justification for this neglect. Their

book contends the validity of using the state as a unit of analysis to explain international relations in Africa and proposes that nations and armed nationalist movements must be recognized as more significant actors (Dunn and Shaw,2001). In *Africa in Global International Relations*, Bischoff et al. state that the voices of Africa in politics and IR must be captured, which have been ignored even by the centers of knowledge production which have played a role in this cognitive injustice. The book does not seek to change the intellectual or spatial geography through which Africa is expressed in IR. But is a request to include the non-Eurocentric mainstream in what some researchers call global IR (Bischoff and et al,2015). The book, however, presents no arguments in favor of replacement paradigms and the issue of IR in Africa.

Fasakin believes that the source of African theoretical contributions in this field hinges on two axes. Firstly, the African researchers of IR can employ African history and events, and the study of history as a discipline, to make major contributions to international relations. Secondly, the postcolonial theory can act as an acceptable entry point for the participation of African IR researchers in this discipline (Fasakin,2018). Brown (2006) also seeks to evaluate this “African critique” and create a basis for a qualified defense of the IR theory. He believes that problematic issues in the IR theory do not emerge only when the individual focuses on Africa but that they exist from the outset (Brown,2006). Taylor and Williams (2004) question the assumption of Africa’s marginality by citing the evaluation of Jean Francois Bayard and Lang Dory when they mention that: “The discourse on the marginalization of Africa is nonsensical now more than any other time. There has always been a nonstop stream of notions and goods being exchanged between Africa and Europe, and the North American continent later on. Africa has never been separated from global politics but has been inevitably involved in the ebbs and flows of events and changes in power structures” (Taylor and Williams,2004).

In the meantime, some analyses on Africa demonstrate the continent mainly as a periphery for the powerful forces that change global politics; a situation that has strengthened the notion of a marginalized Africa and its lack of agency. The outcome of African marginalization has been a lack of interest in it in international relations (Chipaike and Knowledge,2018). This viewpoint aligns with Muhammad Ayoob's argument that Africa has had no place in key IR discourses (i.e., military security and international political

economy) pursued by neorealism and liberalism. According to Ayoob, the solution lies in developing IR theories that consider the peculiar realities of developing states (Ayoob,2002).

The main concern of Markakis et al. (2021) is to answer major questions on nation-states as units of analysis and how African states have developed and been reconstructed repeatedly in response to decolonization and neoliberal pressures to meet Western needs. Is the nation-state model created in the Horn of Africa, or claimed to have been created, currently appropriate for the region (Markakis and et al,2021)?

Despite a significant plethora of literature available on the relationship between the position and form of representation of Africa in international relations, prior scholarly works have not simultaneously addressed the conceptual, methodological, academic, and geographical dimensions through a new critical geopolitics strategy. Thus, this study can work towards a theoretical and explanatory achievement by processing this deficit.

Despite the many questions on African representation in international relations, this paper primarily examines the relationship between the geopolitical status and location of Africa and its conceptual and theoretical representation in IR texts. The study aims to adopt a new approach to critical geopolitics to evaluate the theoretical and conceptual formulations of the IR discipline on “Africa”. To achieve this, after presenting the critical theory of global geopolitics using Andrew Linklater’s thinking, the reasons behind African representation in the disciplines of IR and Geopolitics as it stands today will be explained.

## **2. Methodology**

Given that the nature of this study is fundamentally theoretical, it qualifies as basic theoretical research. It adopts the explanatory-critical analytical method and the library research method for note-taking with a new reading on critical geopolitics in the case study of “Africa”.

## **3. Theoretical Foundations**

### **3-1.A Theoretical Analysis of Global Critical Geopolitics**

The current theoretical approaches of critical geopolitics are derived from postmodernist theoretical-philosophical foundations, social constructivism, and critical theories of Robert Cox. In the present paper, however, efforts are made to define the coordinates of a new approach to critical geopolitics

address some of the criticisms raised against previous approaches to critical geopolitics, which consider this theoretical framework more political than scientific.

### **3-1-1. The Critique of State-Centrism and New Political Communities**

In terms of critical geopolitics, geography must not be reduced to the existing geography of the international system of national governments. In this context, the nation-state is no longer the only legitimate unit of geopolitical analysis because geopolitics is rather scattered due to the large number of actors involved. Building upon Ó Tuathail and Dalby's perspective critical geopolitics departs from traditional geopolitics which defines foreign policy as the study of relations between states. In contrast, critical geopolitics posits that states do not precede intergovernmental relations (IGR). Rather, they are consistently recreated by their actions relative to the outside with which they define themselves. In other words, states and boundaries are conceptually constructed. In this context, foreign policy is a political action to set up borders with another. Therefore, critical geopolitics can be perceived in terms of cultural or linguistic turns. Apart from political maps, we are also faced with the map of meanings. As a result, procedures for drawing boundaries in critical geopolitics are both conceptual and cartographic (Ó Tuathail and et al, 2002; quoted by Torkameh and et al, 2021).

The abovementioned is a critique of realism since it represents the indisputable reality of coexistence between separate and sovereign territorial states in an authoritarian environment. These states limit the scope of our freedoms as members of separate national communities and tailor our identities. (Griffiths and et al, 2008:374). A large part of critical geopolitics, however, seeks to rethink the rigid realm of assumptions in traditional geopolitical thinking. This is a significant feature common to all readings of critical geopolitics: the critique of state-centrism and explanation of new political communities (Torkameh and et al, 2020).

Moving away from state-centrist analyses in world politics is associated with interest in subjectivity and identity in the social sciences. The assumption that international politics is basically a territory (distinct from the spatial territory) is closely correlated with the proposition that states are the main subjects of international politics (Kuus and Agnew, 2008). This indicates that the ruling state is not a given certainty but rather a political construct like the constructs before it in the form of city-states, tribes, and so

on, as assumed by the main theories of IR and geopolitics. Linklater's critical theory, like the critical geopolitics approach, stresses the need to move beyond the present state system and international relations. Through the lens of these two approaches, determining the current relations between countries and the position of each one in the international system involves a pluralistic set of representational actions scattered throughout communities. Both of these approaches critically examine the hierarchical organization of the global space as inherently oriented toward West. In other words, modern geopolitics is seen as the product of Western epistemology and ontology, projecting imperialistic views on the world. In line with this perspective, Dalby argues that critical geopolitics can challenge the geography of the global political space as an assumed system of politics (Torkameh and et al, 2020; Fateminejad,2023). The critical theory of international relations, with similar concerns but in a more affirmative way, has tried to challenge the Western-oriented historical metanarrative of the discipline of IR on ties between different political units. More affirmative in the sense that, in addition to his critique of the Western historical metanarrative, Andrew Linklater has tried to provide a sociological and, at the same time international, alternative for the conceptual-theoretical formulation of identities for the new political communities which cannot be evaluated in the terms of the "state".

### **3-1-2.Critique of the Dominant Geopolitical and IR Metanarratives**

Classical geopolitics described, judged, and classified people according to their race in a matter- of-fact manner by relying on the narrative that Europe is spatially superior. Influenced by this narrative, racial and environmental determinism was formed. Based on this approach, European success over non-European peoples in terms of race and advantageous climate was presented as a scientific theory. Accordingly, these narratives revolve around transcendental, masculine, Western-oriented, and state-oriented concepts. From Haushofer to Bowman and Mackinder to Kissinger, the nature of macro geopolitical narratives and precision of these narratives and theories served as symbols and manifestations of a macro geopolitical narrative. Macro geopolitical narratives are based on the elements of power and see the world from the perspective of the knowledge and ideology of that narrative. Understanding these metanarratives involves deconstructing them as well because by revealing power relations in them the truth of their realism is also questioned, in turn revealing how they have served the

interests of power. The global geography in metanarratives is rather simple, lacking complexity and versatility. According to Ó Tuathail, the outcome of this perspective is that its performance is based on geographical and political oppression (Afzali,2015:133-135). Consistent with this critique, Linklater (2009:4-5) writes:

It is not surprising that societies leading the way for global integration constructed reports on global history to celebrate their unrivalled achievements. A relatively detached view of the past emerged later ... at a time when the European sense of racial and cultural superiority was challenged, leading to the end of its overseas empires. Perhaps this was the only way in which Western thought could recognize the contribution of other civilizations in human development.

From a critical perspective in IR and by citing efforts to answer the question of how regions like Africa, China, and some other regions were excluded from international relations, scholars such as Linklater believe that this discipline can increase its fame by creating closer ties with the study of world history. It will suffice for it to return to the most significant points of communication in history and examine the “encounter between strangers” or us and the “others”. This theoretical tendency in IR, by citing works by Norbert Elias, explains how forming states has accelerated the expansion of geopolitical competition, wars, and globalization (Linklater,2009:6-7).

Last but not least, if critical geopolitics is going to deconstruct the assumed geopolitical narratives, it must initially weaken the implicit assumption of universality (US-Western) that underlies these metanarratives. If critical geopolitics pertains to geography, it must be empirically and theoretically firmly grounded in regions outside North America and Western Europe. Ideas move on and their political applications and functions change in the process. Therefore, we must agree with Linklater that transforming the hegemonic status of some metanarrative claims (specifically the geopolitical narrative in this case) requires expertly revisiting world history with a focus on geopolitics.

### **3-1-3.An Epistemological Critique for Liberation**

In his, book *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Ó Tuathail debates that geography is about power. “The geography of the world is not a product of nature and natural forces but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (Ó Tuathail,2005:16). This is where he

points out that specificities can be as much the object of theorizing as commonness (Torkameh and et al,2021). This notion is also at the heart of Andrew Linklater's approach to critical international relations.

Critical theory in international relations, including critical geopolitics, aims to liberate the discipline and its practitioners. The mission of liberation partly includes the critique of approaches, theories, and concepts that consider their power to explain and describe the presumed reality as sound and certain. Drawn on Horkheimer's traditional-critical dual theory, and Robert Cox's dual theory of "problem-solving" and "critical theory", This critique reveals the incoherence of theories that consider themselves the mainstream of world reality formulations. It challenges theories that construct a world with their own Specific set of concepts and regard any event outside it as mere imagination. This approach based on Adorno's "negative dialectic" sees the attainment of any "knowledge" according to positivist epistemology (and is the foundation of classical geopolitics) as delusional (Esmaeili-Ardakani,2023).

As a philosopher whose views are also used by scholars of the critical theory of international relations, Adorno believes that this "identity" is an inherent process in all conventional types of cognition and theorizing. Knowledge is based on classifying and identifying the identity of phenomena. The subject considers an object and defines its identity with the help of "concepts". However, this process inevitably results in the loss of certain aspects of the object itself, namely, the components are unable to understand some of the meanings of the object in itself. Although, "identity" is in effect necessary and unavoidable. However, if the objective is to recognize the periphery, this method is inherently limiting. Therefore, "non-identity thinking" envisaged by Adorno means that "concepts" never comprehensively include the understood thing. Hence, "a transformative philosophy must stop misleading itself and others that it holds the infinite concept" (Kulakovsky,28 August 2016).

This epistemological component can form the basis for the critique of totalitarian theories and serve the common epistemological basis of critical geopolitics and the critical IR theory; it offers a common basis for the critique of classical theories in geopolitics and international relations that consider their theoretical formulations inviolable from the stance of the subjects they have theorized about. In other words, this approach in classical geopolitics creates a homogeneous danger and vulnerability for people and

locations to impose concepts on the world that are guided by objective knowledge. This representation of global space legitimizes the exertion of power by the West on other countries. Based on this very same concept, critical geopolitics rejects conceptualization as the effort to “understand” the nature of subjects and believes that whatever there is is the social process of constructing meaning and imposing it using the power mechanism of “geopolitical factors” (Torkameh and et al,2021).

Linklater has specified his epistemological point of view based on Habermas' three cognitive divisions of positivism, hermeneutics, and critical theory. In effect, he studies these three thoughts using the dialectical method. Rationalism is an amendment of realism while revolutionism – considered by Linklater as the representation of the critical IR theory – promotes our understanding of IR beyond the shortfalls of rationalism that are prioritized by mainstream IR and classical geopolitical theories. Thus, the epistemological approach intended by Linklater, which is part of the theoretical basis of this paper, can expand the “human ability to determine his own destiny” and bring human subjects more independence than the social relationships characteristic of domination (Linklater,1990:5-21). The subjects of concern in this paper can range from the humans of Africa to the identity of the African continent.

#### **3-1-4.Critique of the Disciplines of IR and Geopolitics**

Critical geopolitics critically questions any simple causal relations between the geographic space and world politics. Instead, it investigates the social construction of “space” and how it is given meaning by a wide range of geopolitical actors and their ideas. In this respect, firstly, it is not the material characteristics (geographical location and military infrastructure) that have made Africa, its issues, and its ideas a marginal region in the IR system. Rather, it is the “dominant” ideologies and views formulating the African position which have created this issue.

Within the field of IR and geopolitics, an ideological framework has emerged wherein American and Western knowledge dominates top journals, associations, and universities in these disciplines. These are the entities and tools that generate ideas and policy recommendations for policymakers and decision-makers. In this bedrock, the disciplines of IR and Geopolitics act as a guide for statesmen, and legitimize their exclusive and aggressive foreign policy programs worldwide (Klinke,2009). The present nature of these two disciplines can also be elucidated with the triple analytical combination that

Cox proposed through ideation, material capabilities, and institutionalization. These ideas paved the way for the domination of Western, and particularly American scientific entities due to their position in the international order. These entities reproduce the knowledge that represents the initial Western-oriented ideas.

In contrast, critical geopolitics considers geopolitics to be a collection of diverse methods to represent the world. It deals with the subject of how politicians formulate the political space of Earth with the help of the relevant intellectuals, organizations, entities, and the media. Critical geopolitics focuses on relations and power dynamics which construct specific perceptions. By using important scientific databases and the powerful, and “perhaps” political, media networks, this approach has become a dominant discourse among some North American and European geographers in recent years.

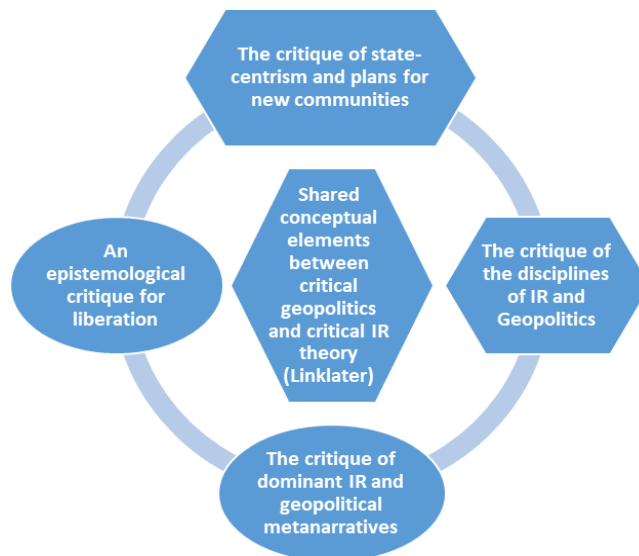
This same impairment shows itself differently in critical theory and the need to change the discipline of international relations. Hence, by adopting an alternative thinking in the dominant theoretical discourses of international relations, these must be shaken to resist the mainstream practices or render them obsolete. Subsequently, the assumed representations which are taken for granted can be discarded and even a political and historical understanding of them can be reached. New associations between various cultural elements can be advocated to open up new methods of thinking and practice in the world of politics. In this sense, it will no longer be traditional geopolitics or upset balances of power in the military and economic sectors holding Africa back from the international stage but the formulation of power to strengthen the position of those who can produce literature to define what is an issue and what is not.

Since critical theory questions the validity of the knowledge produced by problem-solving theories and the nascence of such knowledge, it provides much space for innovative notions to African researchers of international relations by being open to theoretical and conceptual contributions. Critical geopolitics also aims to expose the power dynamics of those involved in macro geopolitical projects, while the approaches of critical theory and critical geopolitics have an anti-hegemonic nature.

All of the four abovementioned propositions - the critique of state-centrism and plans for new political communities, critique of metanarratives and dominant narratives, critique of the disciplines of IR and Geopolitics, and an

epistemological critique for the liberation campaign the dimensions - can be further divided into smaller conceptual and theoretical components. However, since the aim of explaining the above propositions is to reach an analysis in line with this paper, the theoretical explanation of these four propositions will suffice to explain the intention of the author, which is to propose a new theoretical approach to critical geopolitics.

**Figure (1): Theoretical Components of the New Approach to Global Critical Geopolitics (Linklater's Approach)**



#### **4. Research Findings and Analysis**

##### **4-1. The Critical Geopolitical Approach of this Paper in African Representation in IR**

The main literature and narratives produced by classical geopolitics refer to Africa as the “Dark Continent” - a region lacking the potential to create political and economic growth, and instead, creating global disasters and geopolitical crises. The African continent has been disregarded in studies conducted over the past 100 years by the discipline of IR; i.e., since the discipline was established. Terms such as “outside the radar”, “Afro-pessimism”, and “failed states” trace the relationship between the continent and IR (Nkiwane,2001:280). Furthermore, the academic literature on

“Africa and the discipline of International Relations” remains ignored and what has been published often includes rather lengthy complaints about neglecting Africa, or the non-Western world in general, in IR texts. Oftentimes, such complaints have led to unbecoming motivations for this neglect. At worst, it has led to a “racist” label for North American literature on IR. Nevertheless, several reasons exist for the relative negligence of the discipline of IR towards Africa. Some of these pertain to global relations and some to the methodology of the IR discipline in trying to understand and represent the African continent; a methodology which shaped the same impairment in classical geopolitics. Next, we will explain these reasons based on the approach of critical geopolitics adopted by this paper.

#### **4-1-1. The Nature of the Disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics Marginalizing Africa**

Africa plays a significant role in various international crises such as immigration, climate change, hunger, poverty, justice, and growing investment, making it a focal point of study in the field of IR. Nevertheless, African studies remain estranged from the disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics. The key concepts of IR were essentially born in the Western world and its paradigmatic domination in formulating the IR discipline has neglected certain obvious international phenomena in Africa that have been seen in European and North American events. Therefore, Africa has remained a constant “other” in IR which is at the service of producing and confirming the superiority and hegemony of Western knowledge, epistemology, and methodology of international relations and classical geopolitics. In this respect, even when globalization has destabilized the concept of “location” as a limited geographical structure and Africa’s location has been de-territorialized, the African issue continues to remain remote from the discipline of Geopolitics.

The failure of the theories and disciplines of IR and Geopolitics in reflecting African issues due to a monocultural approach has found a wide scope. Relationship theories, like other theories, have a limited scope. They reduce global complexities to embolden certain important characteristics. They rely on conceptual abstractions such as the “state” and “anarchy” to refer to real-world aspects, but in an incomplete and generalized manner. By advancing this discussion, it can be concluded that the nature of the disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics is part of the problem. As such, the theory of

international relations to explain the African situation will remain rather weak and this continent will continue to be neglected in this discipline.

There is a critical need for a different framework outside the mainstream theory of international relations and geopolitics to deal with Africa in the IR discipline. From this angle, International Relations is a profoundly Western discipline which cannot imagine the historical characteristics of post-colonial African states and their globalization. It is built on and limited by historical experiences, and cannot expand its theoretical foundations without self-dissolution. If the discipline is to overcome its limitations, it must recognize the values of non-European cultures, even if such a partnership is at odds with its core doctrines.

Certainly, this is not an acceptable reason to cut off ties between Africa and the IR discipline at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the non-Western, global outlook on international relations is spreading. Here, the noteworthy point in response to a marginalized Africa in the two disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics is the arrival of African studies at a time when the bipolar competition was fully underway for allies wishing to influence newly independent countries. From the outset, these studies showed that African issues, while local and national, have a place in global politics. For instance, the formation of new linguistic and generational identities that were also active socially is understandable as a global trend than solely a national issue. In this approach, Africa is not a faraway place requiring complicated knowledge to connect with the world, but an integral part of our contemporary world.

In the 1980s, critical theory sought to uncover the role of knowledge in the reproduction of asymmetrical and unequal relations. Thus, Africa could help the flow of knowledge from South to North and reduce European centrality in the IR discipline. From the stance of the critical theory, by doing so, IR studies can explain how the world operates in a more inclusive reality. Africa can, therefore, have a bigger share in the study of global international relations, including the importance of people-oriented and gender-sensitive concepts, new epistemological paths to build the IR theory such as the comparative study of civilizations in and out of Africa, agency at the regional level to ensure security and stability, and interventions with paramount focus on local cultural and historical fabrics. Africa shows the importance of cultural and civilizational forces in global politics and how they define the worldview, provide incentives, and are a source of identity.

This can act as a basis for new conceptualizations and sources for theorizing in global IR (Bischoff and et al,2015).

Decolonization of thought in these two disciplines has already started by reviewing the academic curricula in universities but further development is required. Lessons learned in decolonization in the “history” of Africa show that these achievements can be attributed to the flexible philosophy of history which encompasses all human cultures (Faley,2014). Of course, it must be kept in mind that African participation in international relations should not focus solely on claims of African exceptionalism and distinctiveness. Efforts to establish a “School of African International Relations” or African participation must echo globally and can be streamlined into the main core of the IR discipline. By using global IR models to connect with Africa, the global IR should be more authentically grounded in African history rather than Western history and the ideas, institutions, intellectual perspectives, and practices of African states and communities. To achieve this, theorizing can be based on history, culture, thoughts of revolutionary leaders, methods of governance, critical texts of spatial geopolitics, and distinct models of interaction at the local and regional levels. With its lived experiences, Africa can provide models of local and regional interaction for information, enrichment, or reformulation of contemporary global IR studies.

#### **4-1-2.The Epistemology of the Liberating Knowledge Campaign for Africa**

Africa and its issues have often been used as a space for concepts of positivist epistemology formulated outside this culture and location. The post-colonial thinking, considered by some as an attempt to move past Western epistemological frameworks, has fallen into the trap of adapting similar positivist likes and commitments. Rather than starting with the “issue” of Africa and its “problems” for a different type of conceptualization and theorizing, post-colonial thinking has tried to play the “text-centered” game to transform the dominant literature in social studies and IR. Thus, it has failed to adequately represent the African role and position in global social studies.

Based on this experience, new global IR theories must consider that existing theories can reformulate a more inclusive understanding of the African continent and its other related issues by relying on contextual knowledge and interpretive methods. The concepts used must have local validity but also have a wider global application at the same time. These IR theories

cannot and need not replace Western IR theories. Instead, they must aim to enrich Western IR theories by relying on the epistemology of liberating knowledge and using African voices and experiences to empower them to be active in the regional and global order. Setting this as a priority will empower African agency which is, once again, a key factor in global IR and will take the continent beyond the marginalized narrative of the existing classical geopolitics.

The topic of African agency will not only address its marginalization in IR theories but also show the new approach to studying existing regions from the perspective of “regional worlds” beyond the established outlook on regions as independent entities, emphasizing how regions are connected on a global level and contribute to the global order as a whole (Bischoff and et al,2015). Designing concepts and theories derived from liberating knowledge to formulate African issues and prescribe various remedies for global policy will pave the way to form a new way of thinking on Africa.

#### **4-1-3.State-Centrism and Disregarding Experiences of Non-State Political Communities in Africa**

From a critical geopolitical standpoint, the field of International Relations (IR), influenced by Classical Geopolitics, concentrates not only on states but also on major powers, reflecting the realities of international politics and geopolitical relations in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries only. Contrary to the claims of the IR discipline that it studies “international” topics, African scholars believe that IR and geopolitics are concerned with the politics of major powers and formulating the theories of actor states that “make the biggest difference”. As such, they ignore the African experience as an actor in non-state political communities.

From the viewpoint of the critical geopolitical approach in this paper, the disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics only consider the state as the only reliable actor, neglecting other units of analysis such as local and tribal groups and non-state actors that are definitely actors in international relations. Consequently, the conventional theories of IR and geopolitics fail to capture the complex transnational and informal subnational relations that constitute Africa's lived experience. Many structures, methods, and norms derived from the state-centrist experience in the conceptual and theoretical formulations do not apply to the lived experience of Africa which is tribal and community-centered. On the other hand, territorialism as a cornerstone of power and authority is often considered a main criterion of stateism

which leaves little room to analyze the situation and experiences of African states with their tribe-centered way of life (Matshanda,2022:2).

This state-centrist analysis meant that once African countries had been through the process of decolonization, they still faced a fixed state-centrist order when negotiating for their position in global politics, whilst pre-colonial Africa was not organized with fixed borders and nominal national identity. Instead, it had kingdoms and empires with rulers and subjects, and many smaller political entities. These specific blocks of territory, many of which emerged in the Berlin Conference of 1884, have presently become the independent nation-states of the continent. Nevertheless, to some African scholars, the nation-state as a political entity does not fit African realities. Thus, some of them prefer to identify themselves with their tribal or religious groups, or as Pan Africans rather than the citizens of a particular European country. Meanwhile, the Horn of Africa is an extreme example of a phenomenon that is not uncommon in sub-Saharan Africa where a foreign model of political organization has been imposed without considering the consequences. This situation reflects the tension between tradition and modernity, tribe and nation, rural and urban societies, and ruling elites and the rest of the population. Therefore, much of the political strife in sub-Saharan Africa is the result of persistently pursuing this order regardless of its destructive consequences (Englebert and Tull,2008).

The difference between tribe and nation is in relation to the concept of state. When a theory or discipline envisages a tribe as a nation, it has the claims of being a state. However, when the tribal and cultural criteria are not aligned with the “nation”, ethno-culturalism juxtaposes nationality. This is usually present in Africa where ethnic culture is incompatible with the nation-state model. Decades of continuous efforts to limit tribes in favor of the nation have weakened the particular state in Africa. The outcome is the failure of the state to manage political resources due to tribal-cultural and socioeconomic differences and inequalities at the local and national levels. On the other hand, the West has absolved itself of responsibility by attributing the conflicts to local actors, while claiming a lack of agency in Africa and thus justifying foreign intervention in their internal affairs. As in the modernization theory, Western institutions of governance and the market economy are always the answer to state failure (Englebert and Tull,2008).

James Tyner has argued that “our geography, and particularly our political geography, is relatively distant from non-European theories and theorists. Our texts on nationalism and identities are painfully unaware of Pan-African nationalism and other African diasporic movements (Tyner,2004:343; quoted by Sharp,2003)”. However, despite the suggestion of globalism, conventional Western narratives of cosmopolitanism tend to marginalize other transnational connections and experiences.

There are several ways to understand the contemporary crisis of the nation-state project in Africa (Kavianirad and et al,2018). It might be best to think of the Horn of Africa which actively seeks new forms of political organization. The shared issue in the crisis facing the state in the Horn of Africa is that of the nation-state. By foregrounding the current crises of state in the Horn of Africa as evidence of broader challenges of governance in this continent, some researchers mention the pathology of Western social sciences, particularly IR and Geopolitics. Dominant analyses have not considered that the Horn of Africa region is on the vanguard of imagining the alternative political community. Thus, Markakis et al. (2021) believe that it may be more beneficial if we envisage the Horn of Africa as a region presenting empirical alternatives to the postcolonial African nation-state model rather than labeling it as a violent area of conflict. Doubtless, the innovative approach of Andrew Linklater to new political communities with different identities and social affiliations provides the necessary conceptual and theoretical background for a more detailed form of this type of political alternatives for African theorists and elites (Linklater,1990).

#### **4-1-4.The Critique of Dominant Narratives on the Distinct African Historical Experience**

The critical geopolitical analysis presented in this paper reveals a bitter truth that the disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics continue to falsify and distort the history of humanity and the world in order to preserve Western global hegemony. Eurocentrism in effect represents a racist view of the history of the world that is divisive, ahistorical, and ineffective, spreading the myth that Africa is populated by cannibals and uncivilized primitive people without knowledge and culture (Hoskins,1992). Nonetheless, John Henrik Clarke (1970) completely discards this Eurocentric myth with his true claim:

It is often forgotten that when the Europeans surfaced in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and began spreading in the wider world of Africa and Asia, they

increasingly colonized the human race. Later, they colonized global research, mainly to show or argue that Europeans are the only creators of what can be labeled civilization. To achieve this, the Europeans had to forget everything they already knew about Africa, or pretend to forget (Hoskins,1992).

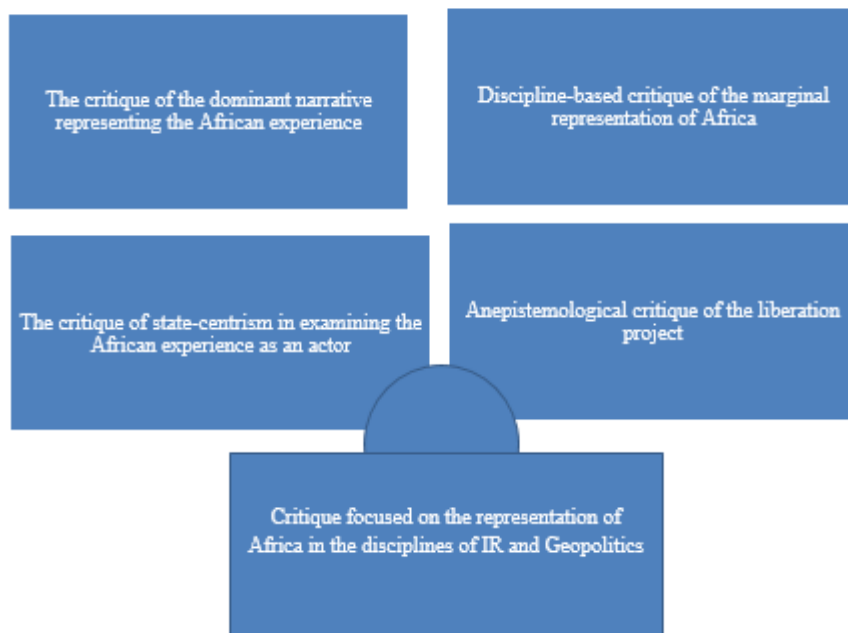
This particular geopolitical way of thinking is not only recognized as the metanarrative of the two disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics, but it is also accepted as the European policy towards African states and the African continent. This specific thinking also accelerated the European propaganda mission to “save” those “heathens” in Africa. There are those who believe that mere survival prompted Europeans to adopt this aggressive geopolitical strategy. In other words, they had to design a reverse psychological warfare strategy to show that the Africans were inferior and the Europeans were truly superior.

From the 1990s, nearly any stressful socioeconomic situations, civil strife, and political unrest in the South have not only been considered a humanitarian challenge for the inhabitants of failed states in prevailing academic and political discourses among the policymakers and scholars of the North, but have also been perceived as a threat to global peace and security, particularly the security of the North. In this view, the failure of states in the South, engaging the security of the North, has been officially recognized in the texts of international development and discourses in Schools of liberalism and security. It has been a way of thinking that has introduced the theoretical and conceptual formulation of Africa as a metaphor of a second-hand subject and the “other” in the liberal democratic order. The failed state, collapsed state, fragile state, pseudostate, criminal state, warlord state ... have all been part of the dominant narrative in this era.

Consequently, influenced by the experiences and historical metanarratives of the transatlantic world, Africa has been marginalized in the disciplines of IR and Classical Geopolitics. This type of marginalizing a metanarrative is also realized in theoretical discussions shaping this research area more than anything else. In effect, the dominant metanarrative has always constructed the African continent as an exception in the areas of geopolitical research and IR in Western global relations (place of conflict, suffering, and disorder incompatible with Westphalian norms of governance and rather ineffective in the global economy). Influenced by this metanarrative and from a

theoretical viewpoint, it seems that the continent is dissociated from the main paradigms of this discipline because it neither shows the conceptual characteristics that are the backbone of epistemological traditions in this discipline nor does it truly fit at the heart of this metanarrative. But Western international relations cannot take all the blame. Researchers who have focused on the studies of international politics have consciously or unconsciously researched the more profound theoretical aspects of the continent in the international order in a very limited way.

**Figure (2): The Analytical Components of African Representation in Global Critical Geopolitics**



## 5. Conclusion

This paper aims to explain the roots of the African representation in the IR discipline in its current form using critical geopolitics with a reading of Linklater's critical theory of international relations as a new approach. We believe that this marginalized state-centrist metanarrative of Africa requires a better understanding and more accurate placement of this continent for its liberation from this metanarrative and a theoretical reformulation based on the new approach of critical geopolitics. The task was achieved with the

formulation of this theoretical approach including the metanarrative and epistemological critiques as its components. By explaining the roots of the current representation of Africa in international relations, the critical geopolitics approach of this paper showed that the disciplines of IR and Geopolitics have been unable to reach a theoretical and explanatory understanding of Africa and its representation in international relations due to the generalization of the conceptual and theoretical formulations of the lived experience or preferred thinking of European states.

From the perspective of the critical geopolitical approach in this paper, concepts such as the failed state and neopatrimonialism<sup>1</sup> used in certain discourses create a reality which is at the service of the hegemonic power. These are not merely theoretical concepts but powerful political aspects to normalize domination. A prime example of this is the concept of the nation-state. The emergence of nation-states as an organized form of dominant governance in international relations ignored the gap between the experiences of the Western world and those of the post-colonial communities, including Africa, who had to use the concepts and assumptions of the new order to be officially recognized. Based on this logic, unless the African communities prove the ability to perform as actors in this new order, these “uncivilized” peoples would be left outside the magical circle of the theoretical-conceptual order of the West; communities for whom transitioning to this stage is vital for “international socialization”. In other words, African communities have to attain this conceptual level before they are accepted by the international community.

Those who use the conceptual-theoretical formulations of the disciplines of IR and Geopolitics to represent and analyze African issues cannot claim that they are representing Africa outside the power and knowledge structures of the lived experiences of major powers. As a result, Africa is represented as a fantasy experience of Western colonialism. Hence, a theoretical approach is required to change the circumstances in favor of a more accurate representation of Africa. By transitioning from the dominant concepts of Western literature on international relations and classical geopolitics, attention must be focused on innovative concepts derived from “global IR” and “non-Western IR”, as well as a theoretical and conceptual reformulation of critical geopolitics.

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1. Dense focus on power by the ruler and his negligence of traditional constraints

To this end, the present paper suggests a reexamination of the components shaping IR theories and texts calling for innovative evaluations of the African position and role in the international history of the world and the different lived experiences of this continent. The fundamental epistemological differences arising from the African experience and history must be heeded without a new attempt in the postcolonial style, to show that the compiled texts comprise one-sided narrative inaccuracies. These differences can be a precursor to shaping a methodological, epistemological, and ontological research program for participation in global international relations and non-western international relations.

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