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Threads and Boundaries: rethinking the intellectual history of International Relations

Or Rosenboim

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Introduction

The Greek mythology tells the story of Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos of Knossos and the keeper of the labyrinth, who gave to her lover Theseus a thread to guide him in the meanders of the maze, in his mission to slay the Minotaur. Ariadne's thread provides the starting point for the historiographic considerations of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg. In his book on historiography and historical truth (2012), he argues that the thread offered to Theseus a connection with the past, as well as a link to the future, like 'the thread of narration, which helps us to orient ourselves in the labyrinth of reality'. In the Greek myth, the thread helps the explorer to find a way out of the unknown. Yet we can imagine the thread through a different metaphor, as a single narrative woven into a complex textile of historical narrations. Historical narrative can be imagined, therefore, as a connecting thread between the past and the future, which can be woven into a new matrix of historical understanding.

The image of historiography as a thread comes to mind in view of the recent surge in historical studies of the disciplinary history of international relations (IR). Over the last twenty years, academic scholars have scrutinized the history of their discipline. The historical narratives they constructed aimed not only at understanding the past but also at providing a sense of direction for the discipline's future. In the process, the scholarly understanding of the history of this academic field has undergone significant changes. The constitutional 'paradigms' of the discipline have been challenged, and new conceptual approaches to the discipline's past surfaced. IR scholars like David Long, Brian C. Schmidt, Lucian M. Ashworth and Peter Wilson advanced innovative and critical interpretations of the discipline's history (Schmidt 2002; Long and Schmidt 2005; Long and Wilson 1998; Ashworth 1999; Wilson 1998). These scholars successfully demonstrated the historical inaccuracy of the 'Great Debates' that had supposedly shaped the analytical framework to study and explain international relations.

The revisionist historians of IR offered alternative historical narratives that aimed at overcoming the simplistic and generalized paradigm-based historiography. However, as Duncan Bell suggested (2009), many leading IR scholars still hang on to conceptions that the revisionist scholarship had deemed outmoded. IR textbooks repeat the same paradigm-laden history that the revisionists set to eradicate (Jackson and Sorensen 2013; Dunne, Kurki and Smith 2013). Despite the important transformative effect of the revisionist historiography, it seems that the debate on the conceptual and historical implications of the 'great debates' has not yet reached its conclusion.

My aim in this chapter is not to evaluate the contribution of the revisionist histories of IR, or to gauge their impact on the discipline. I suggest, however, that the revisionist scholarship helped in debunking conventional interpretations and paving the road for a plurality of innovative and original accounts of the discipline's past. Thus, I argue that new histories of IR should aspire to widen the field of enquiry and complementing the existing narratives with new sophisticated studies of the multiple aspects of the field. A new history of IR should challenge the hegemony of well-established

and widely-accepted narratives about the formation of this field of study. At the same time, however, the 'myths' and 'paradigms' of IR should be integrated into the disciplinary history and be critically examined by exploring the intellectual and political context of their production. Often, this act of re-examination and inclusion will require pushing the boundaries of the discipline and evaluating the importance of interdisciplinary interactions and tensions. In this chapter, I suggest that the dialogue between historians and IR scholar can play a fundamental role in re-shaping the disciplinary history of IR.

Recently, IR scholars have argued that interdisciplinary dialogue with international history can offer particularly useful tools for the analysis of international relations (Williams et al, 2012). The historical study of the development of an academic discipline invites, however, drawing on the theoretical and methodological proposals of another branch of historical research, intellectual history. As a preliminary – not exhaustive – exploration of new paths in IR historiography, I survey the writings of two prominent intellectual historians, Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Galli, who have reflected extensively on the methods of historical enquiry.

The historical writings of Galli and Ginzburg have emerged from different intellectual landscapes: a schmittian legacy inspired Galli's reflections on the history of political thought, while the *Annales* school led Ginzburg to explore historical anomalies in minute detail. Yet as this chapter will show, both Ginzburg and Galli can provide insightful methodological proposals to scholars interested in the history of IR. Their contributions can be located on the horizon of critical theory, which has also permeated International Relations Theory (Cox 1987). The merit of their proposals is grounded, to my mind, in their ability to provide an inspiring imagery for other historians. My intention is not to extract from their writings a well-structured method or a 'recipe' for history writing that other historians should follow with precision. Rather, my reading of Galli and Ginzburg proposes to use their diverse conceptual imageries and metaphors to illuminate aspects of the disciplinary history of IR that have not yet been explored and to challenge the common practices in the historiography of the field. One of my objectives in this chapter is to show that their approaches to history writing are doubtlessly different, but not mutually exclusive, and can be combined in a variety of ways to provide inspiring inputs for IR scholars. This chapter outlines possible ways to integrate their ideas into a flexible and sophisticated investigative approach into the history of IR, without constructing a rigid and restricting historiographic theory.

In the next sections, I focus on two concepts that arise from their writings, Ginzburg's thread and Galli's boundary, as the building blocks of new paths in IR historiography. These theoretical constructs help, I suggest, shedding new light on the main concerns, protagonists and goals of the discipline. In the first section, I employ Ginzburg's historiographic explorations to suggest that the concept of the 'thread' embodies the role of historiography as a guiding map for the meanders of the discipline. The study of IR historiography aims at explaining the discipline's past to historians and practitioners, as well as to elucidate its future aims. Ariadne's thread accompanies the IR scholar into the maze of historical evidence about the discipline's unknown past, but also guide the explorer out of the labyrinth into our times. Furthermore, following Ginzburg, the various threads of historical narrative – myth and truth alike – can be woven together into a complex and multi-layered historiographic fabric.

The second section of this chapter investigates the 'boundaries' of the historiography. Carlo Galli's writings on political spaces sets the framework of my methodological exploration, which aims to understand the conceptual potential of 'boundaries' for IR theorists and thinkers. I propose to interpret the idea of 'boundary' in two distinct ways: as part of the interplay of politics and concrete geographic space, and as a liminal space of interdisciplinary encounter. While boundaries help

distinguish between different institutional and geographical locations as sites of knowledge-making, they also create spheres of exchange and interaction across different disciplines and cultures. This duality renders the boundary a useful perspective on the disciplinary history of IR. I argue that the liminal areas between the imagined disciplinary domain of IR and other academic domains can provide new thematic sources for the study of the discipline's history. Furthermore, an exploration of the boundary zones of IR invites to extend the national contexts of enquiry towards the transnational, regional and global spheres of investigation. However, the investigation of boundary zones also serves to understand the conflicts and practices of exclusion that set the foundation for the discipline of IR. Finally, in the chapter's conclusion, I return to the threads and boundaries of historiography and discuss their relevance to IR in view of the recent 'global turn' in intellectual history.

Collecting the threads

The relations between truth and fiction, fact and myth, which is at the center of Carlo Ginzburg's historiographic scholarship, renders his writings particularly relevant for those who seek to transcend but not dissolve the mythologies of IR. Best known for *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976, 2013), a book that established 'microhistory' as a distinct method of historical research, Ginzburg continues to extend his methodological reflection in different directions. Inspired by the French social historian Marc Bloch, the *Annales* School and the Italian intellectual historian Arnaldo Momigliano, Ginzburg develops a methodological approach which combines a quest for historical anomalies, a close attention to the interplay of truth and fiction, an investigation of textual intentionality and a focus on knowledge production in low culture. In this brief survey of Ginzburg's method, I will point out the relevance of these components of his work to IR historians today.

Comparing the historian to the detective, Ginzburg proposes the 'method of clues' for historical research. His reading of texts begins from a quest for a clue, an exception that does not match the general pattern of thought. Rather than identifying the ways in which the author sought to contribute to a conversation, Ginzburg searches for a hidden or unknown detail that can be interpreted as a sign of a larger structure. The text becomes a mine for historical evidence and unintentional knowledge that the historian can discover despite or regardless of the author's intentions. The selection of texts as case studies depends on whether the historian-detective can find in them an exception that represents a wider problem or phenomenon (Peltonen 2001). Ginzburg encourages the historian to engage in 'slow reading' of texts to discover the importance of the 'apparently insignificant detail, the seemingly trivial phrase of gesture' (Pallaro-Burke 2002: 185).

One of the main themes of his work, which may appeal to historians of IR, is the problem of myth and truth in intellectual history (Ginzburg 1989, 1999, 2012). Myths, in this reading, are traditional narratives aimed at explaining natural or social phenomena and provide a sense of communal or personal identity. They are widely known and shared, but can often be false. Treading the line between history and fiction, Ginzburg endows the historian with a responsibility to interpret texts and define their undocumented contexts. The historian's craft is, for him, a creative and imaginative practice. The goal is not primarily to discover whether the text's author made truthful and compelling arguments, but also to uncover the mistakes, falsities, myths and legends that the author included in the text, consciously or not. His writings explore texts from classic philosophy to early modern political thought to modern art theory and literature to discover not only the arguments their authors intended to convey but also the history of the shared mentality that emerges from the

text without – or regardless of – the authors' intention. For him, 'the historian suggests connections, relationships, parallelisms, which are not always *directly* documented and are only so to the extent to which they refer to phenomena produced in a common economic, social, political cultural and mental context - one which functions, say as the median point of the relationship' (2013, 39).

While resonating with some of the insights proposed by post-modernist scholars, including Hayden White, Ginzburg grounds his work in rich historical erudition, opposing any attempts to obfuscate the distinction between evidence and invention. Thus, as Perry Anderson made clear in his review of *Threads and Traces*, Ginzburg's epistemological position rejects the skeptical treatment of historical truth as a relativist fiction (Anderson 2012). Ginzburg employs fictional texts and literary studies as productive instruments for the analysis of historical texts, yet his work never loses sight of the robust factual structure that sets the basis for a sound historical inquiry. This intellectual equilibrium may be challenging to reproduce. Yet I suggest that Ginzburg's achievement embodies a useful framework for writing the history of International Relations by weaving competing narratives – including myths and falsities – into a complex textile of historical research without undermining the distinction between evidence and invention.

The text remains, according to Ginzburg's, the primary source for historical research, but it can only be understood if woven into a wider context of ideas, beliefs, structures and institutional frameworks. The historian's challenge is to create the connections, links and associations that render the text meaningful, sometimes beyond the explicit indications and references included in it. In this sense, Ginzburg invites the historian to assume more responsibility in the interpretation of the text as a clue to wider phenomena that might not have been a conscious concern for the text's author, but are still reflected in the work. Writing history becomes a creative task of collecting different threads into a coherent yet not uniform fabric of narrative.

Taking a page from Walter Benjamin, Ginzburg argues in favor of reading history against the grain; assuming that all texts include uncontrolled elements, opaque zones of interpretation that escape the author's awareness, Ginzburg's method invites to re-read familiar texts in search of information that had previously been left unnoticed. The analysis of historical sources can therefore reach beyond the understanding of the main argument of the text to include unintended assumptions as well as misunderstandings. The value of a text as historical evidence is not only in its persuasive argument and lucid judgement but also in the underlying and unspecified assumptions of the author, and in the mistakes and misconceptions it embodies.

Ginzburg's discussion of intentionality and its limits invites to reflect on other methods of intellectual history that have already attracted the attention of IR scholars interested in their discipline's history. It has been suggested that the linguistic-contextualist approach can – and should – contribute to revisiting the history of international thought and IR theory (Armitage 2004). Quentin Skinner's investigations of the relationship between language, thought, agency and change emphasizes the particular historical, linguistic and political contexts in which past authors operated by producing their written 'speech acts' (Skinner 2002; Brett 2002). As Annabel Brett suggests, Skinner highlighted the importance of identifying intentionality *within* the written text (rather than in an external, psychological dimension) by exploring the author's choice of specific words and expressions. Skinner developed a methodology based on a contextual reading of historical texts that marks the decisive yet multidimensional role of language in shaping written ideas and arguments as part of a wider conversation.

Without undermining the potential of this methodological path, I suggest that Ginzburg's methodology outlines a more flexible interpretative framework that may help expand the field of

research and create a more pluralistic narrative of the disciplinary history of IR. There are important differences in the goals and practices that emerge from the writings of Ginzburg and those of Skinner or other followers of the so-called 'Cambridge school'. For instance, Ginzburg has no intention to produce a comprehensive study of one concept or writer; his eclectic essays tend to draw on a wide variety of ideas, texts and examples from disparate epochs and places. Furthermore, Ginzburg's challenges the notion of 'intentionality' and puts the historian in charge of discovering – or re-creating – the intellectual connections between written ideas, events, and political structures.

Setting the text in a wider conjuncture of events and structures can help elucidate the relations between the micro (the single text or author) and the macro (the intellectual and political context). Ginzburg's reading of texts in search for clues as exceptional indications of intellectual and political perspectives demands a deep knowledge of the relevant social, economic, political and cultural context of a written text, to discern the structures of thought that direct its arguments. As Anna Davin suggests, 'Ginzburg is centrally concerned with how people see the world, how knowledge is acquired and organised, the frameworks into which they fit information, beliefs, or observations, and the social structure which contains, influences and is influenced by these aspects of knowledge' (Davin 1980: 5). The emphasis on conceptual structures and power relations in the process of knowledge production render his methodological approach relevant for the study of the historical and intellectual development of scholarly disciplines, such as International Relations.

Myth-making has given a powerful stimulus to the creation of the self-image of IR as a distinct discipline, with its conceptual categories, methodological tools, thematic narratives and pedagogic ethos. The discipline's subdivision into 'schools' and their interaction in historical 'great debates', both in academic circles and in the public sphere meant to set the explanatory framework for the discipline's historical development. The so-called 'great debates', that were later cast as 'myths', served as intelligible and easily-shared legitimizing stories that defined the subject matter of IR. Despite their historical inaccuracy, these myths effectively shaped the study of IR: 'as a pedagogic device for bringing order to a bewildering array of theories and approaches—'the menu for choice'—that IR has on offer, the notion of a 'first great debate' is not without merit. But as a statement of historical fact it is highly misleading' (Wilson 1998).

Over the past twenty years, the revisionist historiography has provided a complicated image of the discipline's past as a persuasive alternative to the conventional disciplinary history. There was no actual conversation between 'idealists' and 'realists' about international relations; possibly the 'idealist' school of thought has never even existed. What is, therefore, the long-lasting influence of this myth on the self-image of IR as a discipline, and on the organisation of knowledge about the international sphere in the twentieth century? Debunking the myths should, presumably, help scholars attain a thread of truth that could unify and organize the discipline's past. Nonetheless, following Giznburg's notion of the historical 'thread', I suggest that these myths can still retain valuable information about the evolution of IR and should be reflected in the discipline's historiography. The critical analysis of the previously dominant historiography has not spelled the last word in the study of the discipline's evolution and formation.

It would be advisable to avoid the temptation of imagining Ariadne's thread as a single line of teleological narration that leads from a presumed starting point to a specific destination. Instead, I argue that the metaphorical thread of historical narration is open-ended, and particularly helpful in bringing together the plurality and diversity of IR historiography. Although the foundational myths of IR may be historically inaccurate, they remain a fertile source for understanding the social and intellectual history of IR scholarship. The traditional historiography of IR, which the revisionists sought to overcome, will thus find its place in the intentionally incomplete textile of the discipline,

alongside competing alternative narratives about the discipline's origins and prospects. The task facing IR scholars today is, I suggest, weaving historical narratives, intellectual sources and founding myths into a thicker fabric of meaning that highlights the multi-linear and contextualized nature of knowledge-construction.

A sophisticated history of IR should not set its goal to retrieve an ultimate and persuasive 'truth' but to locate and understand the many historicized aspects of truth, which are often intertwined with myth or false interpretation that retains an explanatory role in the discipline's development. In this reading, Ginzburg's approach outlines a historical epistemology that can set a new research program for historians of IR who are interested in what the paradigmatic history of IR tell us about the ways in which the discipline was conceptualized, and what kind of need this conception of history – inaccurate as it may be – intended to fulfil.

One way to apply this approach to the construction of a new narrative about the history of IR would be to re-read the foundational myths as contextualized sources. What rendered these paradigms of IR so appealing to scholars and researchers? Why did the 'great debate' have such a long-lasting impact on the discipline's historiography? What were their hidden assumptions about the defining categories of international relations? How did previous myths about the birth of the discipline influence their writings? If, as the revisionist scholarship argues, the 'great debates' were no more than 'myths', how did their creation serve to legitimate the structures of the discipline and its internal and external images? As Ginzburg's approach highlights the relations between myth and reality are central to the development of the discipline and to the creation of its self-image.

The issue of intentionality affects also the choice of authors included in the discipline's 'canon'. One of the achievements of the revisionist IR historiography over the last 20 years has been to challenge the 'cast' of scholars who contributed to the foundation of IR, and offer a new set of protagonists who shaped the discipline in the United States and in Britain. The new scholarship presented more sophisticated and complex historical analysis of these figures, mostly related to the realist school of IR: Hans Morgenthau, John Herz, Martin Wight, E. H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl Friedrich (Stirk 2005; Neacsu 2010; Hall 2006; Roesch 2014). These valuable studies extended the limits of the conventional disciplinary history of IR, and enriched our understanding of realism by highlighting the wide range of theoretical positions in it (Bell 2008).

'The method of clues' that Ginzburg proposes embodies another means to follow these attempts to redefine the protagonists of the discipline's history. By casting a wider net in search for 'clues' about the meaning of international relations for past thinkers, Ginzburg's method proposes to lead the historian-detective to look beyond the 'usual suspects' and examine less obvious figures who have contributed to the development of the discipline of IR. These *dramatis personae* may be 'minor' thinkers whose intellectual accomplishments were relatively limited, yet they assume particular importance as conveyers of unintended knowledge about their society, its political structures and common ideas. Despite possible misjudgments, falsities and mistakes, their writings reflect a certain conception of international relations. Their intellectual contribution to IR may be an unintended, implicit aspect of their writings. The founders of the discipline of IR were often also scholars of geography, international law, sociology, anthropology, political science and history, and valued the inter-disciplinary dialogue across the malleably defined fields of study. For example, the head of the school of international affairs at Johns Hopkins University in the 1930s, Owen Lattimore, was a sinologist trained in anthropology with a keen interest in geopolitics. The agenda he set for his department aimed at providing novel answers to problems that these fields of studies gave rise to but failed to resolve.

New studies of IR history could continue expanding the sample of thinkers who have contributed to shaping the discipline's analytical categories and research goals. These thinkers may be scholars who have not developed original and sophisticated theories of international relations yet developed insightful perspectives on IR. Many 'minor' thinkers were not carefully examined by historians of IR because the main aim of their writings was not to contribute to shaping the discipline of IR, or to participate in a wider debate about international affairs. Rather, they might have been interested in reacting in favor or against arguments in international law, geography, political science, economics, anthropology or sociology. For example, the British economists Barbara Wootton and Lionel Robbins, who participated in the mid-century debate about a regional federalist world order, sought to inject the study of international affairs with economic arguments. Each of them proposed an approach to world affairs inspired by economic concerns. Yet their academic and intellectual position outside of the institutional domain of international relations led to their marginalization from the historiography of international relations.

Moreover, by adopting a more inclusive approach to historical sources, scholars of IR can shed light on the works of writers who were socially or politically marginal and were thus denied a public voice. For instance, Robert Vitalis's recent book on the history of IR in the United States (2015) recounts the fascinating story of African-American IR thinkers who remained largely excluded from the conventional historiography of the discipline. Other studies might focus on women thinkers who contributed to shaping international relations in the twentieth century yet were not always formally affiliated to an academic or research institution.[1] Questioning the common narrative about the founding fathers – usually white men – of the discipline of IR aims at correcting a historical wrong, but also at weaving together multiple and diverse experiences and narratives into a coherent fabric of scholarship about world affairs. The hybrid character of IR highlights the need for flexible research projects about the discipline's history that reach out to other subject-matters by seeking the unintended knowledge in written text and, as I will discuss in the next section, by challenging the boundaries of the discipline.

While recent scholarship has paid a greater attention to the evolution of these circles of 'high culture' in the discipline of IR, the contribution of the 'marginal' cultures of IR to the development of the discipline is relatively unknown. Ginzburg's main concern is with popular, "low" culture and the knowledge it produces, but his reflection on the organisation of knowledge can serve as a starting point for an investigation of the formalization of IR as an academic discipline. Examining the history of an academic discipline is necessarily an inquiry into the hubs of power and hegemony, into the realms of funding and institutionalization that have conditioned and influenced research in IR. Ginzburg's method seem particularly apt for the analysis of the rise of scholarly disciplines, since he emphasizes the importance of tracing how certain groups attain control over knowledge production in order to understand the power-knowledge nexus. These reflections resonate, evidently, with the ideas of critical theorists who, following the Frankfurt School or Antonio Gramsci's ideas, have tried to reveal the patterns of power and domination that underlay cultural and social relations (Cox 1983). Yet Ginzburg resists a simplistic explanation of power dynamics which and suggests that it is important to take into account 'the fact that centers and peripheries necessarily imply each other' (Pallares-Burke 2002: 197). The tensions and interactions between the IR thinkers who contributed to the evolving hubs of institutional power within academia and the unaffiliated scholars who remained on the margins of the discipline can be particularly illuminating.

[1] Out of fifty thinkers in International Relations included in Mark Griffith's book (1999), Susan Strange is the only woman to make the general list. In the section on IR and gender, three more thinkers are examined: Jean Bethke Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe and J. Ann Tickner.

The construction of the discipline is closely linked to the formation of networks, dissemination of translations and scholarly exchanges. Since many of the leading IR thinkers in the twentieth century were immigrants, or travelled extensively around the world, the history of the discipline should not be considered exclusively in a national or local lens. Historians should seek clues to analyze the impact of the experience of migration on the development of the discipline across national and cultural boundaries. In his recent study of democracy in the twentieth century, Udi Greenberg (2016) suggests that the German émigrés in the United States constructed influential concepts of democracy based on their on their scholarly and political experience of the interwar Weimar Republic. Their theories of democracy as the foundation for both domestic and international order influenced not only German postwar reconstruction, but also the American cold war policies. Greenberg's study examines a diverse group of scholars – including theologian Waldamar Gurian, IR theorist Hans Morgenthau, lawyer Karl Lowenstein and socialist theorist Ernst Fraenkel – revealing the multiple disciplinary sources of their democratic theories. While these thinkers were not key figures in the foundation of IR as a discipline (with the notable exception of Morgenthau), their writings contributed to shaping ideas about international affairs, weaving together the intellectual traditions of Weimar Germany and Cold War US.

Moreover, the study of translations of key texts as a form of intellectual mediation may set a useful foundation for new studies of the dissemination of concepts across cultures and countries in the discipline of IR. Extending the Early-Modern idea of a transnational republic of letters to the nineteenth and twentieth century, this perspective offers a way to weave together different intellectual practitioners in the field of IR beyond national and linguistic boundaries. Scholars, translators, publishers and institutions all played part in creating a transnational network of scholars of international affairs who share a common interest in key texts or sets of concepts. By examining in detail the fortunes of these transnational conversations and translations, historians may be able to tune in to local particularities without giving priority to one national or regional reality over another.

Ginzburg's approach invites historians to uncover the patterns of power that affect the formation of ideas and opinions about international affairs. Evidently, universities, research institutes, foundations and conferences set the framework for the development of many of these conceptual structures. The examination of the institutional settings of the discipline can help understand its origins, yet the formation of IR as a field of study did not depend exclusively on the intellectual production in the key centers of academic research – elite universities, wealthy think tanks, and leading journals. Rather, knowledge about international relations emerged from a wider discussion that included lesser known thinkers, interdisciplinary and international networks, and peripheral organisations. By moving away from the evident hubs of power, the historian may be able to collect threads of ideas that remained outside the mainstream of IR historiography but nonetheless contributed to the evolution of the discipline. By reconstructing the international thought of marginalized or under-represented groups, which may include women, ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants and others, the historian can challenge the hegemony of the conventional narrative about the formation of the discipline. Without abandoning or dismissing the study of 'elite culture', Ginzburg's approach can help transcend the exclusionary character of many histories of IR, focused on 'great thinkers' and leading institutions which necessarily undermines the plurality of modes of thinking about IR in the past.

Weaving the multiple threads that narrate the disciplinary history of international relations is an act of unification and inclusion. Ginzburg's method provides a means to bring together different narratives and concepts into a complex – yet not necessarily coherent – historical fabric. The method

of clues offers a way to reflect on different narratives and the relations between them. How should the historian locate the interplay between various approaches, interpretations and conceptions of IR in a wider landscape of political, intellectual and historical context? What should be included in the fabric of narrative that emerges from Ginzburg's historiogrpahy, and what should be left out? It is a truism that writing the history of IR as a discipline is an act of inclusion and exclusion, or in other words, it is an act of drawing a boundary. In the next section, I take a step backwards, and turn from the micro level of investigation proposed by Ginzburg to a wider gaze on the landscape of historical research.

Drawing Boundaries

Investigating the history of IR as an exercise in boundary making is an approach that embodies, I argue, a high interpretative potential. I will consider the meaning of the 'boundary' as a conceptual image through the methodological perspective of 'political space', with particular attention to the writings of the Italian historian and political thinker Carlo Galli. The idea of 'political space' has recently received the attention of IR scholars, who highlighted the importance of considering the relations between political order and geographic conditions (Starr 2013). Moreover, in historical research the 'spatial turn' embodies a new conceptual attention to the importance of 'space', 'place', 'location' and 'spatiality' as categories for understanding and analyzing historical knowledge (Withers 2009). By using the categories of political space and boundary, I do not intend to impose a rigid theory of political space on past thinkers (Jerram 2013). Rather, I employ Galli's conceptual framework developed to argue that a consideration of the theoretical and concrete-physical qualities of the 'political space' of a written text can reveal how past thinkers experienced the geographic reality and represented it in their international thought. Thus, the notion of political space becomes a method of reading texts, that can recover the practical spaces of international relations, formed by states, communities, federations, transnational unions, regional organisations or universal constitutions, as well as the theoretical spaces of the discipline shaped by its interpretative tools and research questions.

The starting point of Galli's reflection on political space is the interplay between theoretical ideas and geographical reality. 'Political space' thus entails the perception of the physical geographic conditions of the world and their impact on the political and social order (Galli 2010). I employ the term 'political space' to reflect on the theoretical conceptualization of the geographic materiality of politics. As an interpretative tool, it can bring together the concrete geopolitical aspects of international relations with the more abstract notion of order. Importantly, the notion of 'political space' transcends the theoretical and thematic concerns of geopolitics, political geography and similar disciplines. The key feature of 'political space' is the move from the experience of geographic space to its representation in abstract political categories.

Galli's short essay *Political Spaces* (2001, 2010) constructs an analysis of political concepts that can be defined as a 'genealogy of political spaces' (Sitze 2010). Following Foucault, he presents 'political spaces' as a complex non-linear genealogy, a network of concepts, sometimes contradictory and always in close relations with the historical events that accompany their formation. Foucault describes the Nietzschean concept of genealogy as a historical analysis of the variations of an idea, not as a quest for its origins (Foucault 1991). There is no pretense for universal and absolute truth, but instead a strong insistence on the contingent, concrete and specific history of the idea through time and space. By focusing on contingency, genealogy aims to deconstruct the historical and

intellectual narrative, and reveal the disunity and complexity that accompanied its historical development.

Galli's theoretical quest is based on two hypothesis. First, he writes that the relevant conception of space for his enquiry is 'a specifically *political* space. It is, even more precisely, the space of the *implicit spatial representations* in and through which political thought supports itself.' He argues that 'space is one of the inescapable dimensions for politics; it is through specifically spatial representations that political theories form their concepts, arrange their actors, organize their actions and devise the aims of politics in terms of collaboration and conflict, order and disorder, hierarchy and equality, inclusion and exclusion, borders and freedom, sedentariness and nomadism, marginality and centrality.' (2010: 4)

The second hypothesis of Galli's notion of political space is that 'the spatial representations that are implicit in political thought derive from the concrete perception and organization of geographic space as experienced by a given society. The implicit spatial representations of political thought refer back to the explicit displacements of space realized by the concrete articulation of power.. on the world stage' (2010: 5). Thus, Galli's two hypostases reveal the dualism between theory and experience at the foundation of the notion of political space. Political spaces are constructed as implicit representations of spatiality, but at the same time refer back to concrete spatial order in a historical society.

The study of the political spaces can trace the multiple variations of the theoretical representations of the experience of geographical space by following a complicated trajectory of descent, *herkunft*. Galli, like Foucault, aims at deconstructing and reconstructing the categories of politics through the complex historical descent of spatial concepts. By understanding the spatial foundations of politics, it is possible to 'cut' political knowledge, and give it a specific shape within the wider continuum of historical change and variation. Yet, historical and theoretical knowledge is also essential to 'cut' the space, and thus give it political order. In this double sense, Galli's arguments follow Foucault's claim that 'knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting' (1991: 88).

The exploration of political spaces is not limited to describing the physical spaces in the world or to studying scientific geography. Rather, a 'political space' is concerned with the conceptual move performed by political thinkers who create political categories to represent concrete geographic experiences. Political categories such as universalism, pluralism, globalization, nationalism and community rely for Galli on the cartographic images that the political thinker had in mind, the subjective understanding of the physical world as the living environment for humanity, and the interpretation of the capability of political power to change and orient this space. The political understanding of space is not passive and deterministic; space founds political categories, but is also shaped and given order by political power. The interaction between geography and politics is a two-way relation: political relations affect the geographical conditions of the world, yet are also influenced by them.

Understanding the theoretical interpretations of politics throughout history requires, for Galli, to discover the implicit and explicit assumptions about space. Thus, the notion of political space becomes a 'key' to decipher texts of political theory. Galli does not direct our quest towards specific themes, or filters political theories through the idea of space. His is a much more general claim about the necessary relation between space and politics. He goes back to trace the complicated history of modern political ideas, in order to investigate their immanent though sometimes implicit notions of space. Underlining the close relationship between spatiality and political concepts, his main claim resonates with Foucault's *énoncé*, suggesting that the 'political representations of space'

create a network of rules and categories that allow the understanding of the political sphere (Foucault 1972).

Galli's attention to spatiality in politics draws a set of connections through the history of political thought that permits the historian to reveal the relations between ideas, concrete geopolitical conditions and historical events. The analysis of political spaces is not limited to thinkers from specific periods, origins and backgrounds. Rather, I suggest it is advisable to resist an anachronistic and a-historical analysis that imposes ideas upon past thinkers. Possibly, the solution is to follow Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of contingency in historical accounts of political thought. Thus, for example, in *Political Space,* the genealogy of political space is reconstructed through the writings of a variety of thinkers united not by similar conceptual spaces, but by their very attention to space and its concrete, historical and geopolitical foundations. The connecting thread, to use Ginzburg's image, is the attention dedicated to the problematic relationship between political ideas and spatial order.

Epochal changes in the conceptions of space, its division and its appropriation have a direct impact on the categories of the political. The notion of 'political space' serves also, therefore, to bring together the temporal and spatial dimensions of political thought. Temporal transitions in political and international thought – for example from modernity to globalism – make sense if grounded in spatial conceptions. For Galli, the study of 'political spaces' can help discover the conceptual categories that condition and transform 'the political', a concept that he borrows from Carl Schmitt (2003, 2015). In this framework, the Nomos of the Earth, or the spatial-legal order of the world, becomes an outcome of processes of conquest, lawmaking, boundary formation and war, which modify space over time and give it political shape and meaning. The spatial dimensions of political thought are important because they can reveal the contingent and changing foundational laws that define political order.

Political representations of spatial experience create the foundational political categories of an epoch in time. Galli suggests with Schmitt that political categories of modernity are based on spatial representations and formed as opposites: interior/exterior, friend/foe, particular/universal. But these categories are not the essence of Galli's method, they are its product. Different categories, which emphasize other aspects of the organizing faculties of politics over space, are possible. Indeed, for Galli, the spatial experience of the global age proposes a sharp discontinuity with modernity, and therefore requires new categories of the political. The challenge of reading texts through the notion of political space is to discover the relevant categories of politics that emerge through the author's spatial interpretation and can set in motion or reflect epochal changes.

How can theories of political spaces inform the intellectual history of the discipline of international relations? Galli highlights the *quality* of spatial representation of politics. In order to fully comprehend political spaces in intellectual history, it is necessary to ask 'what can this space *do*?'. The investigation can focus on the ways geographic reality informs political theory and shapes its conceptual categories. For instance, Galli argues that in Hobbes' theory, there is a double attention to space. On the one hand, the historical experience of the discovery of America, an 'empty space', inspired his 'state of nature': a natural, uniform space of nature and conflict. On the other hand, we can see in Hobbes a completely theoretical model of political space, which construes politics as geometric, hierarchical and artificially constructed. Therefore, 'political spaces' refers to actual experience of the world, yet also provides an analytical approach for the spatial organization of political theory.

Since political order-giving is a continuing process of change, the history of political spaces is non-linear, complex and heterogeneous. The idea of 'political space' contains an inherent ambiguity which may transform into conceptual vagueness. Thus, this method is not without risk. It tends to obfuscate the line between theory and 'concrete politics', and to emphasize the continuous interaction between theory, politics and history. The meaning of 'political spaces' can be diluted to encompass a lot and explain little. This potential setback resonates with the possible shortcomings of Ginzburg's methodological proposals, and the solution may be similar. The vagueness of the notion of 'political space' can be contained by rich erudition and meticulous historical analysis, which pays attention to particular circumstances surrounding a text or institution.

If treated with the necessary caution, the analysis of political space can reveal the historical, political and geopolitical experiences behind political texts, and by consequence, the author's understanding of the defining categories of politics. Galli suggests that, for example, Hegel saw the American (and African) geographical 'empty spaces' as devoid of history. Geography was fundamental for him in determining the trajectory of the objective Spirit in the world, since the Spirit reproduce the concrete historical and geographical experience of societies and ethnic groups. By claiming that those who have 'no past' (Africa and America) cannot be counted among the founders of *Weltgeschichte*, Hegel underlined the inescapably euro-centric foundation of law, history and therefore of politics (Galli 2012: 26, 72).

Political space provides the theoretical framework for thinking about the 'boundary' as an analytical concept in IR historiography. A boundary can be defined as a line of division between two different spatial entities. Following Galli's reading of Schmitt, I suggest that the act of drawing boundaries is inherently political, and thus depends on the categories of thought related to the realm of politics. In this section, I offer a preliminary investigation of different kinds of boundaries dividing geographical, institutional and disciplinary spaces. Thus, I suggest, boundaries depend on political categories created through the processes of experience and representation of concrete geographical space. The experience of spatial concreteness embodied in these boundaries is complex and multilayered, and deserves, I argue, further exploration.

The boundary also offers, obviously, an opportunity to reflect on the concrete geographical spaces of IR historiography. Through the foundation of institutions, conferences and schools, the conceptual boundaries of the discipline acquired their own physical and geographical spaces as well. The interaction between these different political spaces – institutional and geopolitical – provides a fruitful approach to studying the history of IR. The map of the boundaries of the discipline can retract geopolitical relations, which depend on the location of universities, research centers and private institutions, on the geographical diffusion of publications, and on the migration patterns of scholars and researchers. The exploration of the conceptual boundaries of IR cannot be detached, I argue, from the concrete, geopolitical aspects of the discipline's development.

The geopolitical boundaries of IR offer a fertile ground for historical investigation. The dominant IR historiographical narrative remains focused on Britain and the United States, demarcating clear boundaries between the academic spheres in these countries and the rest of the world. In this context, discovering the political assumptions that defined the boundaries of this institutional map of IR is key for understanding the discipline's fortunes. Recent scholarship has paid attention to the emergence of the discipline of IR in other national settings, often focusing on Europe (Waever 1998; Jørgensen 2000; Friedrichs 2004; Tickner and Waever 2008; Jørgensen and Knudsen 2006). This perspective can provide the theoretical and historical foundation for understanding the different national disciplinary settings and their modes of interaction, while recognizing their transformation over time.

Language has an important role in creating institutional boundaries. It is safe to argue that the limits of language constructed a barrier to international scholarly conversations in IR, and restricted the geographical context of IR historiography. Where English-language publications were not readily available – for example, in Italy – the scholarly community remained relatively immune to ideas developed in Britain and the United States (Brighi and Rosenboim 2016, Friedrichs 2004). Moreover, it is evident that the linguistic closure in Italy led to a pervasive sense of marginalization that undermined the development of the discipline. In France and other countries, a local approach to IR emerged, but the conversation with the wider community of scholars remained limited for decades. Furthermore, as recent scholarship on the theory of translation has shown, it is not always possible to convey abstract ideas in the same manner in different languages; something often remains 'lost in translation'. Thus, even when pivotal IR texts were translated into other languages, their theoretical impact and conceptual meaning might have mutated. The transformations of concepts in translation is a vast topic that deserves particular attention in the study of the historiography of IR.

The surge in studies of non-English language scholarship in IR can be reinforced by an alternative approach to the historiography which focuses not only on tracing the genealogies of the boundaries between diverse national contexts, but also on uncovering the intellectual exchanges at geographical and disciplinary frontier zones. Transnational institutions and think tanks, such as the Institute for Pacific Relations, and personal experience of travel and migration can provide the historical grounding for a study of scholarly connections across national borders. The IPR, for example, connected institutes of international research in various countries with interests around the Pacific shores, including the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China and Japan. Despite linguistic differences, the institute sought to create a common space for discussion on international affairs, bound by common geopolitical interests. Marking the geographic and disciplinary boundaries as political spaces of exchange and transition rather than a line of separation and division, can provide a new perspective on the relations between individual thinkers, institutions and organizations across national, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Yet the examination of the political spaces of the IPR can reveal patterns of power which reflect the unequal positions of the various national members.

The attention to the power relations that characterize this institutional landscape resonates with the growing attention to empire in IR historiography. Scholars have explored the capacity of the imperial order to set the geopolitical and theoretical boundaries for the study of international relations (Long and Schmidt 2005). This perspective still contains a wealth of possibilities for new interpretations of the discipline's history. The experience of empire had an important influence on the institutional and conceptual frameworks for thinking about international relations. In Britain, for example, there are evident personal, structural and intellectual connecting threads between the Round Table group and the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). In the interwar years, the institute became an important hub for thinking about international affairs in Britain. Reconstructing the political spaces of this institutional structure can help trace the permeation of the political categories of empire into international thought. For example, future studies can explore how the perceived boundaries of civilization conditioned the definition of the international sphere and its political components. The 'eurocentric' focus of the discipline of IR and the legacy of the imperial order on international thought have not escaped scholarly criticism (Hobson 2012, Morefield 2014). Yet the impact of the imperial boundaries – expressed through colonial ideologies and administrative structures – on the development of IR as a field of study has not yet been explored in full.

Thinking about political space through the notion of the boundary may help resist a universal history of IR. A historical narrative that highlights the local and particular conditions of the emergence of IR

as a field of study embodies a challenge to any coherently structured story of the emergence of the discipline through concrete and clearly defined debates. Instead, exploring the category of political space is an opportunity for a deeper and wider examination of the intellectual sources of IR in specific institutional locations. Over the past twenty years, a prominent stream of scholarship about the history of IR sought to reconstruct the institutional structures of the discipline to explain its academic and intellectual identity (Long 2006; Dunne 1998). Recent histories of IR highlighted the importance of academic departments, international conferences and think tanks to shaping the academic discipline in the United States and Britain (Guilhot 2010; Guilhot 2011; Parmar 2012). These studies suggest that is worth exploring the history of international relations through not only theoretical constructions and geopolitical spheres but also concrete physical and intellectual loci: institutional sites, research groups, think tanks, private associations, international conferences and personal encounters. The empirical study of the transnational connections of these institutional sites extends further the complex historiography of the scholarly communities that shaped international thought. By relying on a close and careful analysis of primary sources, this form of historical research may offer an opportunity to delineate the concrete locations of IR and thus avoid the intellectual pitfall of vague generalizations and abstract constructions.

The image of the 'boundary' can lead the investigator to analyze also conceptual spatial constructions such as the spaces of academic disciplines. The historiography of IR emerged, to a large extent, as an attempt to define and assert the discipline in comparison and contrast to Political Science, History, Law, Geography and Sociology. The 'boundary' thus becomes a conceptual tool to investigate the limits of a field of study and its interactions with other academic disciplines. The creation of disciplinary boundaries is a complex and non-linear process that depends on multiple patterns of inclusion and exclusion, on selection of themes and figures, on development of methods and research tools.

The boundaries of the discipline shed light on the political processes that shaped the formation of its defining conceptual categories. The interactions around the boundary of a discipline can be characterized by patterns of conflict, tensions and competition between disciplines, schools of thought and individuals. Galli's return to the Schmittian categories of friend and foe thus provides one possible framework for the analysis of the relations between the emerging academic discipline of IR and other social sciences, as well as other non-academic hubs of research on international affairs.

When boundaries construct barriers to interaction, they invite to reflect on problems of legitimacy and efficacy. Following Ginzburg's method of clues, it may be useful to explore the boundary zone in search for indications of subversion and resistance to the common practices in the bounded space. Interdisciplinary scholars, marginalized voices, émigré intellectuals and social minorities whose writings crossed disciplinary boundaries can provide evidence on consensual practices within the main stream of the discipline and on attempts to break away from them. Integrating episodes of opposition and rebellion into the historiography of IR may help outlining a more complex and nuanced account of the discipline's past.

However, reading the historiography of IR through the lens of political spaces does not reduce the boundaries to areas of eternal conflict. Further research in the historiography of IR could potentially uncover patterns of constructive exchange and cross-fertilization in institutional and intellectual spaces of interaction between IR and other disciplines. Boundaries can also be understood as hybrid spaces, 'borderlands' of interaction through fruitful dialogue between methodologies, interpretations and approaches. Drawing a 'boundary' demarcates the limits of a discipline, while at

the same time invites to test the flexibility of the discipline's founding principles through the encounter with an external, alternative worldviews.

Engaging with the notion of 'boundary' means not only discovering the genealogy of the conceptual and geographical limits of the discipline, but also challenging and questioning these divides. Clearly, boundaries are not set in stone: the effective division of disciplinary and geographical space changes over time and depends on the legitimacy and support granted by those who act and move in this space. The growing field of 'borderland studies' reflects this tendency to engage with the notion of the boundary as a geopolitical, spatial, conceptual and analytical category. The contributions to the main journal in this field, *Journal of Borderline Studies,* show that many scholars consider the border as a hub of integration, interaction and exchange. These ideas resonate with the theoretical reflections of Owen Lattimore, James C. Scott and others who have challenged the rigidity of boundaries and invited to re-conceptualize them as hybrid frontier zones.

The examination of boundaries in the history of IR leads to a closer analysis of the cross-boundary interactions between different disciplinary spaces. Practitioners and theorists of international relations sought to differentiate the disciplinary identity of IR from other disciplines, yet the intellectual and political spaces they created were not impermeable. The act of disciplinary boundary making has not been a full and immediate success. It is useful to remember that at least until the Second World War, for many IR thinkers in the United States, disciplinary divides were flexible. Many of those associated today with the foundation of the discipline freely drew upon scholarship in other fields. Some of them did not define themselves as IR scholars, but had other intellectual or professional affiliations.

These scholars were positioned in a boundary zone, an area of exchange and interaction formed through transnational and transdisciplinary conversations about international relations and about the political categories employed to analyze the international sphere. As I suggested in the previous section, some thinkers, like Robbins and Wootton contributed indirectly to the shaping of the discipline, without explicit intention to associate themselves with it. Others brought to the study of international relations methodologies and problems related to other disciplines. One important example of cross-disciplinary scholarship is Nicholas J. Spykman, who was appointed chair of the Yale department in international relations in 1935, co-founded the Yale Institute of International Studies and was its first director until 1940. In the early stages of his career, Spykman was trained in sociology and wrote his doctoral thesis on Georg Simmel, later published as a book. As a professor of IR, he turned to geography and geopolitics as indispensable source for the study of international affairs. Spykman's career highlights the malleability of disciplinary boundaries in mid-century United States, and underlines the important contribution of interdisciplinary dialogue to the foundation of research programs in IR.

Another émigré turned leading IR scholar, Hans Morgenthau, built on his scholarly training in international law as he developed his theory of international relations. Recent scholarship paid attention to the importance of his early legal studies in Germany for his international thought and teachings (Greenberg 2016, Roesche 2014) and sought to 're-engage with the substance of Morgenthau's thinking' (Williams 2007). Yet the interdisciplinary character of Morgenthau's formation and scholarship is not unique – indeed, following Ginzburg's method of clues – one might argue that his exceptional figure indicates a larger pattern of intellectual development in the field of international relations. Not all of the intellectual émigrés were, perhaps, as successful as Morgenthau, Carl J. Friedrich and Arnold Wolfers in asserting their position in their new homeland, but the history of international relations could benefit from retrieving the writings of other, minor or less-known scholars who built on interdisciplinary knowledge to think about IR.

The experience of migration changed, I argue, the spatial perspective of these intellectuals, whose scholarship often served as a bridge between different cultural, scholarly and political traditions. Thus, the notion of the boundary is endowed with a double meaning in their regard, both geopolitical and conceptual. The boundary can thus become an investigative tool in the hands of the disciplinary historian and a thematic perspective on their international thought. A study of the representations of political space in their international thought may be helpful in shading light on the political categories that directed their ideas on world affairs.

Drawing the conceptual and geographical boundaries of IR helps reiterate the figures, institutions and texts who helped shape the discipline. Importantly, the space captured within the discipline's boundaries is as interesting as the space outside. The historical exercise of examining the discipline's boundaries is particularly helpful in expanding the pool of scholars, thinkers and authors who reflected on the meaning and scope of this field of research. Some were later recognized for their contribution, while others remained outside of the established field. The notions of 'political space' and 'boundary' provide the historian with the conceptual and methodological tools to investigate spatial interpretations within texts about international relations, and at the same time, to chart and challenge the historiographic landscape of the discipline.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I proposed to expand the revisionist trend by employing methods developed in intellectual history, revolving around two conceptual images, the thread and the boundary. Inspired by the writings of Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Galli, I reflected on the potential contribution of the thread and the boundary, two imaginary lines, as methodological instruments to redraw the history of international relations as a field of study and academic discipline. The combination of the methodological proposals of Galli and Ginzburg embodies a double gaze at the history of the discipline, attentive to both micro analysis of connections and macro examination of spatiality.

The methodological proposals at the core of this chapter resonate with the 'global turn' in intellectual history, which seek to explore the distinctly 'global' or 'international' dimensions of the field. The growing interest in the 'global' does not, however, diminish the vagueness of the term. Should historians attempt to write a 'global' intellectual history of IR? What would it look like? Would the global intellectual history of IR focus on specific themes, such as universalism, globalization or world order? Should it aim to overcome the national focus of certain branches of current IR historiography? The difficulty to define the global scale of historical investigation, or the meaning of the 'global' space in the context of IR, led some scholars to reject this concept as too sloppy and unhelpful.

In their edited book on global intellectual history, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori seek to avoid the pitfalls of a conclusive definition of the 'global' by offering intellectual historians alternative models for the subject matter of such historiography. Instead of outlining the characteristics of the 'global' as a geopolitical space, they suggest seeing the 'global' as an analytical category used by the historian. As they argue, 'the global scale of the enterprise [of historical research] is established by the intention of the investigator and the terms of the investigation it is not an actor's or native category, not does it depend on specific historical conditions of interconnectedness' (Moyn and Sartori 2013).

The methodological proposals I outlined in this chapter can shed light on the meaning of the 'global' and the possible – if limited – relevance of this concept to the study of IR historiography. For example, Ginzburg's flexible approach relies on the ability of the historian to weave threads of

narrative and explore historical 'clues' across disciplines, continents and epochs. The quest for historical 'clues' invites the historian to transcend national boundaries and underline the movement of ideas, categories of thought and concepts from one place to another. The thread of narrative provides a conceptual instrument for thinking about intellectual and political interconnectedness in the history of the discipline. In this perspective, the global becomes a tool in the historian's hand to reconstruct the conceptual and contingent connections between ideas, individuals and institutions beyond national and regional boundaries. The 'global' dimension of investigation seems a necessary condition for the success of Ginzburg's eclectic historical methodology. Yet it does not imply that history writing should be all-encompassing or universal. Rather, it seeks to highlight the intellectual links that connect individuals, cultures, institutions and concepts into a complex – and sometimes coherent – fabric.

The historical investigation of the geopolitical and conceptual boundaries of the discipline of IR and its fundamental categories of thought challenges the perception of the 'global' as a universal, all-inclusive space. By employing the category of the 'global', IR historians need not necessarily focus on the common aspects of different communities or polities; they may extend their sphere of reference to interrogate past practices of exclusion and inequality, of domination and resistance. The boundary seeks to complicate the landscape of the discipline's history by focusing on its spatial divisions. The divided – and often overlapping – spaces highlight the relations of the 'global' space to other political spaces as the state, the community, the federation, the region or the continent. The conception of political space highlights the determining power of the boundary in defining political categories. The overlap of different spatial units – global, regional, national, local – complicates the conceptual and geographic functions of the boundary, and opens up new possibilities for thinking about the 'international' sphere.

The reconstruction of a global 'republic of letters' might contribute to understanding patterns of transmission of ideas and sharing research outcomes, yet the notion of the boundary suggests that attention should also be given to the barriers that obstruct the flow of information and ideas. The act of retrieving the boundaries of the discipline invites the historian to engage in a deep examination of the evolution of the community of scholars in a specific intellectual or institutional site, and reconstruct the nature of their social relations. For example, the role of research seminars, workshops, international conferences and study groups becomes particularly important as a bound space for the creation of ideas in IR and the exclusion of others. The boundary can highlight the possible limits of the concept of the 'global' by uncovering local resistance to this concept, or alternative interpretations of the global and its political implications in different parts of the world. Importantly, Galli's perception of political space helps remember that the creation of spatial categories – such as the global – is an essentially political act, which should be comprehended in the appropriate context of contending political, social and cultural powers.

Finally, the notions of 'thread' and 'boundary' are obviously not meant to set the foundations for new paradigms in the history of IR. Rather, the intention here is to ignite the imagination of historians, invite them to step out of the known paths of history writing, and to adopt conceptual frameworks of intellectual history to challenge the common knowledge of IR. The 'boundary' and the 'thread' may offer an opportunity to outline richer, multi-layered narratives about IR history, which pay attention to the plurality of geographic and intellectual locations characterizing the discipline's past, and to the boundaries that still limit its present.

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