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Roundtable Review 15-38

Adam Lerner. *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9780197623596.

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 Introduction by Brent J. Steele, University of Utah

I am honored to provide this brief introduction to the roundtable discussion on Adam Lerner's award-winning book.¹ As Lerner notes in his response, I endorsed it with a highly favourable blurb. I wrote:

Through meticulous, powerful, and gripping case studies and a careful but also forceful set of theoretical assertions, Lerner's ambitious book brilliantly demonstrates the impact of collective trauma and mass violence upon international politics in the past, present, and future.

The book is summarized well by the roundtable reviewers, Fahd Humayun, Raymond I. Orr, and Andrea Purdeková. In short, *From the Ashes of History* is a treatment of collective trauma's influences, impacts, and effects. The book is organized into two parts, one theoretical (chapters 1-3); the other more empirical. The latter examines colonial trauma in India, the Eichmann trial's echoing of trauma in Israeli foreign policy, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in and following US "war on terror" combat (chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively).

I have long been interested in trauma, which became a particular focus through especially the works of Kate Schick and has been maintained in the ongoing, powerful work of Alexandria Innes.² These interests worked within, or sometimes alongside, my interests in ontological security studies (OSS). Purdeková's insightful critique of Lerner's book details the specific strand or theme within OSS that focuses on the securitization of memory, aka work on "mnemonic security,"³ and how trauma plays prominently in that research community. While ontological security is referenced only briefly by Lerner, I appreciate his meticulous treatment of trauma in this book, which I expect will enliven and enrich our understanding of it for a variety of fields and interests going forward, as I discuss in my closing sentences of this essay.

Lerner's response to the roundtable participants is instructive for the field of international relations (IR). It demonstrates how he sees the book vis-à-vis IR, and his own contributions with it to IR. His reflections on it are persuasive and well-grounded. He discusses the goals he pursued in writing the book, and the interdisciplinary disposition he approached when researching and writing it. He identifies, for instance, as both an IR scholar, focusing on debates in IR's mainstream, and (in his empirical cases) a historian. Lerner's response addresses only some of the reviewers' concerns. He is frank about the fact that a book can't speak to every

¹ It received the 2023 Edgar S. Furniss book award from Ohio State's Mershon Center for International Security Studies, the 2023 Peter Katzenstein book award from Cornell University, the 2023 APSA Ideas, Knowledge, and Politics book award, the 2023 ISA International Ethics book award, and was named an honorable mention for the 2023 Hedley Bull Prize from ECPR and the 2023 ISA Theory book prize.

² Kate Schick, "Acting out and Working through: Trauma and (In)Security," *Review of International Studies* 37:4 (2011): 1,837-1,855; Alexandria Innes, "Accounting for Inequalities: Divided Selves and Divided States in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 29:3 (2023): 651-672. Innes and I published an essay in an edited volume that I consider to be an iconic one on trauma, by Erica Resende and Erica Budryte, see: Innes and Brent J. Steele, "Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security," in Erica Resende and Dovile Budryte, eds., *Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases and Debates* (London: Routledge, 2013): 15-29.

³ Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory Must be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonic Security," *Security Dialogue* 46:3 (2015): 221-237; Dovile Budryte, Erica Almeida Resende, and Douglas Becker, "'Defending Memory': Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonic In/Security and Crisis in Global Politics," *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 6:1 (2020): 5-19; Jelena Subotic, "Political Memory after State Death: The Abandoned Yugoslav National Pavilion at Auschwitz," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32:3 (2019): 245-262.

constituency, issue, or topic in an academic community, let alone multiple and even at times seemingly unrelated fields outside of one's own.

There are three reviews of Lerner's work in this roundtable all complementing one another in their critiques of the book, or, as Lerner notes in his response "the three reviews speak to the disciplinary tension at the heart of the book." Humayun's review focuses on its case selection, as well as pushing back against Lerner's characterization of an IR mainstream that Lerner sees as not being as attentive to trauma. Humayun observes in this vein how "IR scholarship has been more conscientious" in thinking about "stand-ins" for loss including trauma. Orr's review brings out one tendency in the book to elevate even for analytical purposes the discourses of elites perhaps at the expense of a focus on "subalterns." Purdekova's review highlights the lack of sustained engagement with related research areas such as memory studies and ontological security studies.

One can draw conclusions about the state of International Relations today from the discussion around Orr's and Purdekova's points on the need to bring in more marginalized experiences regarding trauma. For instance, Purdekova notes that in the case of the US and the rise of the PTSD discourse, "we hear little from the veterans themselves as a way to forefront the tensions between translating personal trauma to national policy narratives," a tension that I find to be of particular importance (in both directions, in fact).⁴ Lerner argues that a discussion of the marginalized voices could potentially "come at the cost of the project's ambitions of offering a critique of and contribution to mainstream IR."

Lerner's attention in the conclusion of his response, instead, is to redirect our understanding of "generalization" regarding works like his that are, at their core, "theory building, rather than theory testing or discrete causal identification." Indeed, this follows from his careful, sophisticated, and (in my opinion) correct view of narratives as "implying" causality "even when such causal linkages cannot be firmly established" (56). As Faye Donnelly and I asserted in our work on Critical Security History, "the problem with ... positivist explanation is that it overlooks the ways in which these causal narratives become politicised and mobilised."⁵ Lerner centralizes the latter through his attention to the mobilization of causal narratives about and from trauma. In doing so, he situates his work as that of someone who sees generalization as a part of "dialogue" across the spectrum of "episto-methodological" approaches.

I hope that this dialogue will find traction in the ways he envisions. I tend to think that in place of seeking an account that is "generalizable," we might substitute a related but somewhat different goal of making it transferable.⁶ Rigorous, organized, powerful, and creative interpretive works like this can definitely generate insights that are transferable even to (perhaps especially to) different phenomena that nevertheless unfold into configurations and constellations that recall for us the original great work. How many causal narratives might we notice that have been deployed, and continue to get deployed, but not only by "elite discourses" studied by Lerner but also in the media, the everyday, the cultural and historical artefacts that shape our past and present? These are worthy of attention precisely because of their political potency as well as their

⁴ Brent J. Steele, "From Subjects to Objects: Honor Flights and US Ontological Insecurity," *International Relations* 36:4 (2022): 616-637.

⁵ Faye Donnelly and Steele, "Critical Security History: (De)Securitisation, Ontological Security, and Insecure Memories," *European Journal of International Security* 4: 2 (2019): 209-226, p. 213.

⁶ Ellen Pader issued this hope in discussing her approach to ethnography, wherein "Each insight leads to new questions that are transferable", in her contribution to the Yanow and Schwartz-Shea volume on Interpretive Methods. Ellen Pader, "Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations beneath the Surface of Public Policies," in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (London: Routledge, 2014): 194-208.

(perhaps too) casual approach to causality. My hunch therefore is that Lerner's book will be recalled for some time precisely because of its innovative, and, yes, ambitious, transferability.

Contributors:

Adam B. Lerner is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Bachelor of Liberal Arts Program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. His first book, *From the Ashes of History*, received the 2023 Edgar S. Furniss book award from Ohio State's Mershon Center for International Security Studies, the 2023 Peter Katzenstein book award from Cornell University, the 2023 APSA Ideas, Knowledge, and Politics book award, the 2023 ISA International Ethics book award, and was named an honorable mention for the 2023 Hedley Bull Prize from ECPR and the 2023 ISA Theory book prize. His articles have appeared in multiple refereed outlets, including *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Theory*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *International Affairs*, and *International History Review*.

Brent J. Steele is the Francis D. Wormuth Presidential Chair, Department Chair and Professor of Political Science at the University of Utah, and the co-editor in chief of *Global Studies Quarterly*. He is the author of the recently published *Vicarious Identity in International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2021), with Chris Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, and *Restraint in International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), which co-won the ISA Theory section book award for 2020.

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Raymond I. Orr is the Elizabeth White Endowed Chair Professor of Political Science at The University of Miami. He is also a senior fellow at the Atlantic Institute for Social Equity at the University of Melbourne. Prior to joining Miami, he was the Mae and John Hueston Distinguished Professor of Native American and Indigenous Studies at Dartmouth College, served as Chair of the Department of Native American Studies at The University of Oklahoma and lecturer of Indigenous politics at The University of Melbourne. He is the author of *Reservation Politics: Economic Development, Historical Trauma and Intra-tribal Conflict* (2017) published with the University of Oklahoma Press. His work examines political attitudes toward Indigenous peoples in settler states and comparisons of Indigenous political power in the contemporary period.

Andrea Purdeková is Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor in Conflict and Security at the Department of Politics, Languages, and International Studies at the University of Bath. Prior to the current appointment, she held a Departmental Lectureship in African Politics at the University of Oxford and a Junior Research Fellowship at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. She holds a DPhil in International Development from the Department of International Development (ODID), University of Oxford. Purdeková's work focuses on the politics of transitional justice and memory in contexts of community-based violence and has undertaken fieldwork research in Rwanda, Burundi and Kenya. Most recently, she has been exploring the nexus between memory and security in the wake of mass violence. Her work has appeared in a range of peer-reviewed journals, including most recently in a lead article in *Security Dialogue* on securitization of forgetting and sites of anti-memory in the context of Kenya's counterterrorism.

In *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics*, Adam B. Lerner asks us to consider trauma's long-term collective impact as a critical object of study in international politics. The book's argument—that international relations (IR) scholars should not shy away from considering trauma's long-term consequences as a powerful explanatory logic that accounts for identity, inter-group conflict and political action—is supported by three case studies that illustrate a variety of nationalisms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Lerner structures his argument in two parts. The first part of the book is centered on Lerner's criticism of the “event” model that dominates IR scholarship.¹ Drawing on an array of interdisciplinary insights from the literature on trauma studies, Lerner contends that consequences of events, rather than discrete episodes, are important if scholars wish to fully understand how history shapes the present.² The second part of the book then devotes a chapter to each of Lerner's three cases—India, Israel, and the United States—tracing precisely how collective trauma “can reshape identity discourses, altering established meanings and shaping policy imaginaries” (206).

From the Ashes of History will undoubtedly spur a debate on the extent to which IR literature has neglected the study of collective trauma as an analytical tool to explain a variety of historical outcomes and psychosocial behaviors over the past decades. As Lerner observes: “By atomizing mass violence into discrete episodes concluded in linear time, much of IR sanitizes collective trauma from analysis, focusing instead on the concrete changes that violent ‘events’ produce in the balance of power, international political economy, or security calculations” (9). Lerner also does not hold back in pitting himself against the rationalist paradigm, arguing that the tendency of rationalist approaches to treat actors as disregarding the “sunk costs” of past actions can lead IR scholars to grossly misdiagnose the motivations of individuals, communities, and states.³ This is a valid observation. Even so, perhaps because Lerner is so clear-eyed about the subfield's paradigmatic shortfalls, some of his insights may warrant some qualification.

For instance, while it is true that IR as a subfield has indeed failed to concretely think about trauma as an important collective phenomenon shaping outcomes of interest, it is also the case that recent political violence and IR scholarship has been more conscientious in thinking about how numbers of battle-deaths, war outcomes, loss of territory, and other markers of crisis severity could be used as stand-ins to measure extremity of loss; so it is not as if academic scholarship discounts the loss model in international politics altogether.⁴ Similarly, while Lerner plainly admits that he “does not seek to identify a falsely parsimonious

¹ For debates around events, description and empirical analyses, see Gary, King, “Event Count Models for International Relations: Generalizations and Applications,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2 (June 1989): 123-47; Andrew R. Hom, “Timing Is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 69-79; Andrew R. Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Ian Shapiro, “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do about It,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (August 2002): 596-619.

² See Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Adam B. Lerner, “What's It Like to Be a State? An Argument for State Consciousness,” *International Theory* 13, no. 2 (July 2021): 260-86.

³ For seminal scholarship on rationalist approaches to international relations, see: James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414; Robert Powell, “War as a Commitment Problem,” *International Organization* vol. 60, no. 1 (2006): 169-203; Fearon, “Cooperation, Conflict, and the Costs of Anarchy,” *International Organization*, vol. 72, no. 3 (2018): 523-559.

⁴ See, for instance: Laia Balcells, “The Consequences of Victimization on Political Identities: Evidence from Spain,” *Politics & Society*, vol 40, no.3 (2012):311-479; Noam Lupu and Leonid Peisakhin, “The Legacy of Political Violence Across Generations,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol 61 no. 4 (2017):836-851; Matthew Fuhrmann and

explanation of collective trauma as an isolatable causal mechanism with specific, consistent effects, nor [does he] predict how it will develop into the future” (12), one might wish that Lerner had been slightly less insistent about not conceptualizing collective trauma systematically. While it is true that the author’s current conceptualization allows for a high degree of flexibility, one possible criticism may be that it limits our understanding of collective trauma to a level of abstraction that precludes effective comparison, even if it allows for classification.

This observation is also borne from the interesting choices Lerner makes around case selection. In his India case study, Lerner tackles the difficult question of how colonial trauma has shaped autarkic state-building in post-colonial India after independence from British rule in 1947 (95). In his Israeli case study, Lerner traces how Israeli elites used the trial of Holocaust perpetrator Adolf Eichmann in the early 1960s to strategically produce a variant of collective trauma narrative that he labels “victimhood nationalism” (137). And in his United States case, Lerner looks at how the global war on terror (GWOT) after 2001 facilitated the collectivization and integration of soldiers’ war traumas—particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—into political imaginaries (182). While all three cases are singularly unique in their consideration and treatment of collective trauma, the distance between the first two cases and third case raises some questions about Lerner’s criteria for case-selection.

Lerner notes that each of the three cases was selected precisely to demonstrate the utility of the book’s overarching theoretical insight, and thus “should not be seen as representative points along a unidimensional distribution of collective traumas” (18). While one can agree that a high degree of contextual dependence to case-specific narratives makes any simplified out-of-sample testing exceedingly difficult, this approach could be potentially dissatisfying for comparativists looking for most similar or least similar cases. For instance, in his accounting of post-1947 state-building in India, Lerner argues that while extant studies have largely focused on how the production of violence during colonialism and the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 affected the choices made by post-independence leaders, these accounts are somewhat imprecise because they “fail to distinguish India’s unique nationalist politics from the wide array of other postcolonial states with differing historical experiences” (97).⁵ This is a slightly difficult argument to evaluate because Lerner does not fully illustrate how variation in historical experiences leads to different post-colonial outcomes, why the same historical experiences (as in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh) ended up producing explicitly different trauma narratives, and how scholars should think about downstream consequences such as grievance-based identity politics that are *not* exclusively determined by collective trauma.

Similarly, while the book hints that that understanding trauma’s effects can help scholars better understand nationalist politics in places as far a-flung as India, Hungary, and China (5)—the three examples that are treated to full case studies are presented with a high degree of case-specificity that makes it challenging to think about extra-territorial parallels, despite the potential generalizability of “victimhood” nationalism to cases such as China, Japan and South Korea.⁶ Also, while Lerner argues that a related goal of the project is to

Michael C. Horowitz, “When Leaders Matter: Rebel Experience and Nuclear Proliferation,” *The Journal of Politics*, vol 77, no. 1 (2015):72-87; Michael C. Horowitz and Allan C. Stam, “How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders,” *International Organization*, vol 68, no. 3 (2014):527-559.

⁵ See: Stuart Corbridge and John Harris, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism, and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Arvind Panagariya, *India: The Emerging Giant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); T. N. Srinivasan and Suresh D. Tendulkar, *Reintegrating India with the World Economy* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2003).

⁶ Two recent studies worth mentioning: Eun A Jo, “Memory, Institutions, and the Domestic Politics of South Korean–Japanese Relations,” *International Organization* 76:4 (2022): 767-798; James D. Kim, “The Long-run Impact of Childhood Wartime Violence on Preferences for Nuclear Proliferation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2023); <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027231159287>.

extend the study of trauma beyond the Western contexts in which trauma studies have traditionally been developed (11), it seems odd that two of Lerner's three cases—America and Israel—are politically embedded in the Global North. As such, it is not clear that the study's coverage allows it to speak for diverse forms of trauma, suffering, and oppression, for example in Latin America, Africa and the Arab Middle East, whose encounters with slavery and a chronology of imperial projects feels somewhat under-championed as far as scholarly attention is concerned. Poignantly, Lerner's third case on the GWOT strikes a chord in this vein—even as he spotlights the PTSD of American soldiers, Lerner skillfully notes that by reassigning victimhood to traumatized American soldiers, the GWOT also “[crowded out] Iraqi and Afghan victims of public sympathy” (179).

One final area that is likely to attract scholarly debate is Lerner's intriguing separation of collective trauma (a noun) from the collectivization of trauma (a verb), given that, as per the author's own definition, trauma does not happen on its own but is the result of the operationalization of narratives of mass violence's legacy (9). The author illustrates this idea by invoking some interesting examples of norm entrepreneurs including Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic (25) who managed to bend the norms of acceptability to produce large-scale violence. But absent such explicit entrepreneurship, it is a little unclear whether collective trauma can be expected to shape IR outcomes in a meaningful way. Put differently, absent its active and explicit collectivization, does and indeed should trauma matter for IR?

These observations aside, *From the Ashes of History* is an important, well-written, and nicely argued book that will encourage many scholars of international relations and political violence to critically re-engage with historical context as an indispensable analytical framework for understanding questions around identity, conflict, and political action.

Review by Raymond I. Orr, The University of Miami

Trauma may render us both unreflective and over-reflective. Adam B. Lerner's *From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics* incorporates trauma in a way that neither overwhelms political phenomena nor disappears within it. Put another way, the challenge for politics as an explanatory science is that, if trauma were somewhere, why is it not everywhere? If trauma might do something, why might it not do everything given that life and brutality are often the same? *From the Ashes of History* offers a worthwhile set of possibilities to many of these questions. It does so through three case studies, all well-trodden political processes, though ones which Lerner argues are enhanced by placing trauma at the forefront.

An intervention by trauma research into political science is welcome. Trauma's original unit of analysis was that of the individual with Freud and Charcot's bourgeois hysteric.¹ The analysis of trauma expanded by considering collective experiences in the form of shell-shocked World War I veterans.² Intergenerational trauma, a subset of trauma research, is interested in how trauma "moves" down generations through focusing on the behavior of children of Holocaust survivors.³ Lerner follows these prior expansions by considering how trauma effects political phenomena. In providing an answer, Lerner's book has three chapters based on theoretical accounts of trauma followed by three case-study chapters that focus on Indian state-building, the Israeli prosecution of Nazi leader and Holocaust orchestrator Adolf Eichmann, and US combat trauma.

There are prior works that engage trauma as a central political force that are not discussed in *From the Ashes of History*. From political theory there is Wendy Brown's *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1994) that seeks to understand how woundedness became a location for political identity.⁴ Also from theory is Adrian Parr's *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (2008) on public remembrance and its political significance.⁵ At the intersection of American political development and political theory is Michael Rogin's *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (1975), a psycho-analytical approach that links President Andrew Jackson's childhood to his attitudes and policies.⁶ From comparative and ethnic politics there is my *Reservation Politics: Economic Development, Historical Trauma and Intra-tribal Conflict* (2017) which contrasts self-interest against traumatic re-enactment within the experience of American Indian tribes.⁷ Such omissions do not diminish the value of *From the Ashes of History*, rather it speaks to the necessity that all authors face in sequestering their intellectual terrain for justification and contribution. It may also speak to the thin dispersal of trauma literature that engages politics and how far it is from an organized, coherent or even identified theme in the field. This limited and aforementioned literature has sought to offer a new approach to political phenomena the field of for decades. It is my hope that *From the Ashes of History* succeeds in moving trauma to central consideration in political science or at least international relations (IR). Trauma is too interesting a concept, and too fundamental to our inner and outer worlds, not to deserve a similar consideration that income inequality or racism might have in political analysis

¹ Mark S. Micale, "On the 'Disappearance' of Hysteria: A Study in the Clinical Deconstruction of a Diagnosis," *Isis* 84: 3 (1993): 496-526.

² Elizabeth Ann Danto, "Trauma and the State with Sigmund Freud as Witness," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 48 (2016): 50-56.

³ Natan Kellermann, "Transmission of Holocaust Trauma-An Integrative View," *Psychiatry* 64 (2001): 256-67.

⁴ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵ Adrian Parr, *Deleuze and Memorial Culture: Desire, Singular Memory and the Politics of Trauma* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

⁶ Michael Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (London: Routledge, 1975)

⁷ Raymond I. Orr, *Reservation Politics: Economic Development, Historical Trauma and Intra-tribal Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

(in fact trauma might be the larger category of phenomenon in which inequality and racism exist). That said, trauma is a particularly messy concept and, by invoking it as an interpretative lens, it implicates scholars in a scheme of human emotion and cognition that is as much an indictment of human nature (or individual character) as it is an explanatory tool.

Motivating *From the Ashes of History* is IR's interest in mass violence. More specifically, despite the degree to which violence forms the basis of IR, there is relatively sparse theorizing of collective trauma in the field. In IR's defense, it is not as though trauma has constituted a central theme in other major sub-fields in political science. The standard "event model" for IR is "violent episodes as having defined durations, beginning with identifiable dawns and culminating in conclusive dusks" (4), according to Lerner. His intervention, and central claim in this book, is to disrupt the "linear event model of mass violence" by focusing on the "festering wounds of history that defy the event model's assumption" (4). The book, in Lerner's words, is to "advocate for a new approach to understanding histories of mass violence reverberate in the present" (5). Particularly valuable in Lerner's account is how "mass violence becomes politically embedded over time" and trauma's ability to "resurge in importance during pivotal movements and motivate action" (5). Explaining this process is of value to our understanding of the political world and Lerner's work is a success in that regard.

The theoretical section of the book starts with identity. Here Lerner provides an overview of trauma's classical nineteenth-century source. The focus during this period is the individual, though a worthwhile endpoint for this section is Lerner's building to a "fluid ontology" (86) that characterizes trauma's ascendancy which cuts across national boundaries. These first chapters serve as an overview of trauma and do the necessary work of bringing political scientists up to speed so to speak on elements of trauma. This section argues for an "narrative identity" (66) approach to political theory as identity is "no different from other key international political theory concepts such as the state or norms, which similarly have murky conceptual boundaries but nonetheless help constitute international politics" (72). Indeed, life is more than a collection of facts, hence a "narrative," but further attention to the expansive and tentacular power or appeal of trauma might have strengthened, or more forcefully advocated for the necessity of using trauma as a lens. A tension in the work is that it offers an account of party politics or elite discourse, and that trauma and the traumatized do not fit easily into such a neat narrative.

This early section is necessary to erode the "distinctions between personal identity and social identity" (79). In doing so it allows trauma to move to the collective and ultimately a polity's practices. Lerner further describes the international identity of collective trauma. The book's theoretical section builds to "identity discourses" as a reframed international order that includes trauma interest groups that supersede national boundaries. The case-study chapters provide more grounded phenomena on how elites utilize trauma.

Lerner's first case study is India. Political-induced famine, communal violence, and intra-Indian ethnic conflict around partition all solidified the legacy of colonial trauma. Lerner acknowledges the overall adequacy of accounts of India's post-independence dynamics⁸ but uses the "lens of collective trauma to unpack Indian economic nationalist discourse" (97) which "brought together varied accounts of economic hardship into a nationalist vision, adding emotional resonance to otherwise technical policy debates" (97-98). Among the book's smaller arguments, the central claim is that colonial trauma primed the population for arguments for "autarkic self-sufficiency" (97). Anti-colonialist narratives indeed provide strong cover stories.

⁸ Such dynamics include economic development, ethnic conflict arising partition, the drive to political and economic self-sufficiency, and the creation of something approximate to collective identity.

Enter Israel. This second case study also focuses on state-building, looks at the ways that the Holocaust facilitated the establishment of Israel and the shift in focus from prior threats in Europe to those from nearby Arab nations. The event that best captures the political utility of trauma in this shift is the arrest, trial, and execution of Adolf Eichmann, and this chapter revolves around these events. Starting with the reparations policy with West Germany, where “Ben-Gurion and his Mapai allies sought to carefully downplay any symbolic forgiveness” (145) in order to avoid perceived weakness, the Eichmann trial was an “opportunity [for Ben-Gurion] to remedy his state’s political weakness and promote a strategic reinterpretation of Holocaust trauma...” (152). The clandestine mission to capture Eichmann, smuggle him across national borders (violating Argentinian sovereignty) and have him tried in Israel more than suggested a strong, dynamic state. Ben-Gurion’s strategy depended upon promoting a “victimhood nationalist identity” (155) that, according to Lerner, is apparent in the interviews during this period that conflate Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser with Germany’s Chancellor and dictator Adolf Hitler (157).

The final empirical chapter focuses on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and US politics after the 2003 invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Lerner argues that in these conflicts, media and government reports show greater interest in PTSD and trauma than they did in prior wars. Elite politics in the US during this period reflect (or create) trauma awareness, with candidates discussing trauma and PTSD in national political debates in 2004, 2008, and 2012. Lerner contrast trauma’s inclusion in this later period with it going unmentioned during similar electoral and political events in 2000. This chapter makes claims that are especially worth considering. It examines “how PTSD’s collectivization and politicization in the twenty-first-century United States have excreted productive power that has blurred boundaries around the pivotal concepts of war” (178). Through the experience of war veterans, we can see trauma move from an individual to a collective issue. War comes home and therefore is not a foreign geopolitical issue but a domestic one, and therefore further blurring boundaries. As such this chapter’s claims should receive a close read from those working on new interest groups in IR.⁹

These case studies are done well. The chapters revolve around elite discourse as the primary focus of analysis and this works within the conventions of political science and IR. But the way in which Lerner explores trauma illustrates a potential incompatibility of trauma studies and political science. The traumatized make no direct appearance in this book. Elite discourse is perhaps the most sanitary approach to trauma. Yet, trauma mangles us, with the past absconding with the future. That politicians utilize prior tragedies for political gain, and that war veterans differ from earlier cohorts in how they are considered or described in society, are important political phenomena. However, trauma, as a human tragedy, is not included in such approaches.

“For whom the gods seek to destroy, they first render mad,” (256) Sophocles wrote in *Antigone*.¹⁰ The traumatized do not think properly, if such a type of thinking exists. Lerner is not alone in his approach and perhaps this sanitized approach is the most responsible one that can open the possibility of further work. It is certainly a common approach and the one with fewer costs. We see scholars in anthropology, ethnic studies, literature, Indigenous studies, sociology, and public health, to name just a few fields, appropriate the lens of trauma (often through the term “victim”) but distance their work from the full implications of the theory.¹¹

⁹ See, for example, Thomas Ambrosio’s *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002) or Elizabeth A. Bloodgood’s “The Interest Group Analogy: International Non-Governmental Advocacy Organisations in International Politics,” *Review of International Studies* 37:1 (2011): 93-120.

¹⁰ Sophocles, “Antigone” in Richard Claverhouse Jebb, ed., *The Plays and Fragments* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1900).

¹¹ A prominent example, for instance, in American Indian and ethnic studies is Andrea Smith’s *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). Hailed as a decisive work on violence, colonization, and the victimization of Indigenous women, *Conquest* documents widespread sexual abuse but not account for trauma as a cyclical phenomenon. In this account of sexual abuse, traumatic experiences do not predispose victims to

To accept the role of trauma is to accept human nature as one in which mothers, hallucinating about their own childhoods, drown their children, and that people, who are unable to escape the traumatic pasts, have tortured lives. For trauma to be accepted by scholars as a useful approach given current norms in writing and research, scholars may find it prudent to shed what trauma exposes: an account of humanity at its worst, which is to say monstrous, haunted, and weak.

Trauma as a lens makes us consider that we are against ourselves. It is to acknowledge that horror is not a learning experience to be avoided but the grounds for further horror. Trauma requires appreciating, if not placing at the forefront, the insanity of those unable to protect themselves. Writing and research on trauma is not for the bashful. Homer's *Odyssey* followed a combat veteran, perhaps suffering from delusion, on his murderous, conniving voyage home. Freud uncovered sexual abuse in polite Viennese society, a scandal to all, including Freud himself.¹² Scholars of intergenerational trauma have learned that Holocaust survivors may become terrible parents.¹³ Combat veteran studies have identified men and women who scream in the night¹⁴ and may never be present enough to love as they wish again.¹⁵ Researchers on the life course of child sex-abuse victims have discovered future drug addicts¹⁶ who may expose their own children to similar abuse.¹⁷ This is difficult material to situate in political science.

Despite such concerns about how trauma is written about in the social sciences, *From the Ashes of History* does plenty of good work. It is a powerful book for IR on how elite discourse, recognizing trauma as a social identity, has shifted in the last 70 years. I hope that Lerner's excellent book challenges many in the next generation of political scholars in addition to those in IR.

greater risk of future ill-treatment. To make such a connection would implicate the behavior of those who had endured hardship and exploitation with their future suffering, which is a core feature of trauma theory. Making a similar point to my own is Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Fassin and Rechtman argue that those advocating on behalf of victimized groups have both expanded claims to resources and collective consideration while achieving a political status that is unassailable. In this way, much of the knowledge to be gained from what trauma theory offers is lost, as the key agent who (the traumatized) is no longer the unit of analysis.

¹² Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* translated from German by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1981 [1896]):189-221.

¹³ See Vivian Rakoff, John J. Sigal and Nathan B. Epstein, "Children and families of concentration camp survivors," *Canada's Mental Health* 14 (1967): 24-26.

¹⁴ See Thomas C. Neylan, Charles R. Marmar, Thomas J. Metzler, Daniel S. Weiss, Douglas F. Zatzick, Kevin L. Delucchi, Roger M. Wu and Frank B. Schoenfeld, "Sleep Disturbances in the Vietnam Generation: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample of Male Vietnam Veterans," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 155(7) (1998): 929-933.

¹⁵ See David S. Riggs, Christina A. Byrne, Frank W. Weathers and Brett T. Litz, "The Quality of the Intimate Relationships of Male Vietnam Veterans: Problems Associated with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Trauma Stress* 11:1 (1998):87-101.

¹⁶ See Jane Liebschutz, Jacqueline B Savetsky, Richard Saitz, Nicholas J Horton, Christine Lloyd-Travaglini, Jeffrey H Samet, "The Relationship between Sexual and Physical Abuse and Substance Abuse Consequences." *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 22:3 (2002): 121-128 or and Catherine C. Classen, Oxana Gronskaya, Palesh and Rashi Aggarwal, "Sexual Revictimization: A Review of the Empirical Literature." *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 6:2 (2005): 103-29.

¹⁷ See Jessica M. Solis, Julia M. Shadur, Alison R. Burns and Andrea M. Hussong, "Understanding the Diverse Needs of Children Whose Parents Abuse Substances," *Current Drug Abuse Reviews* 5:2 (2012): 135-47.

 Review by Andrea Purdeková, University of Bath

In *From the Ashes of History*, Lerner offers a much-needed look at the way in which violent collective trauma—whether in the form of colonialism, genocide, or prolonged combat—shapes international politics. The role of trauma’s formative power at aggregate levels of politics is undoubtedly one of the book’s most important and original contributions. Whereas there is burgeoning literature connecting memory of mass violence to the shaping of domestic and international politics,¹ this typically stays with case studies. Lerner here offers a collection of three very different country cases—India, Israel, and the USA—to demonstrate trauma’s enduring power to shape economic policy, international justice, and aid, as well as military interventionism. In doing this, Lerner firmly positions trauma as a useful new lens through which to rediscover well-trodden topics and theories in international relations (IR).

Lerner’s core project is to argue and show how trauma can shape both international actors’ identities and their interactions. In this, he certainly succeeds across the board. The book first carefully theorizes collective trauma and its connections to identity, before applying these insights to its three case studies. The empirical section then uses the trauma lens to “illuminate new connections within these histories, offering novel interpretations” (92). The chapter on India effectively shows how prominent nationalist figures weaved colonial trauma into their narratives of collective identity and used it to help “justify a prevailing logic that autarky and economic self-sufficiency were vital to preventing further oppression and mass violence” (97). In the case of US’s Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and veteran trauma, Lerner clearly demonstrates how the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) discourse emerged as a dominant collective trauma narrative, and the ways in which it became politically instrumentalized to underscore the war’s costs and enduring impacts.

One of the most significant and powerful insights of the book is that of the crisis of representation: the way in which trauma only uneasily translates across levels, from individual suffering which often resists language and representation, to collective memory, which might simplify, negate or instrumentalize trauma for a range of political purposes. This powerful paradox and tension is vividly captured in the case of Israel and the rise of what Lerner calls “victimhood nationalism” (135). The chapter does a wonderful job in weaving concrete individual stories, court proceedings (e.g., 164 on Attorney General Gideon Hausner’s sculpting of victim testimony), and broader political interests in showing the way in which the trauma of Holocaust gets strategically transposed on contemporary security concerns and agendas.

However, Lerner does not quite explore the crisis of representation in equal depth across all three chapters. This is a bit of a lost opportunity. The chapter on India’s autarky policies is largely a historical re-description of elite narratives through the lens of colonial trauma, with little attempt to bring out the crisis of representation (103) and the tension between elites and the rural poor by including subaltern voices and stories. Similarly, in the case of the US and the rise of the PTSD discourse, we hear little from the veterans

¹ For a few examples see: David Mwambari, “Emergence of Post-Genocide Collective Memory in Rwanda’s International Relations,” in Elijah Nyaga Munyi, David Mwambari, and Aleksis Ylönen, eds., *Beyond History: African Agency in Development, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020): 119-134; Anja Mihr, “Regime Consolidation through Transitional Justice in Europe: The Cases of Germany, Spain and Turkey,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 11(1): 113–131; Maria Mälksoo, “Militant Memocracy in International Relations: Mnemonical Status, Anxiety, and Memory Laws in Eastern Europe,” *Review of International Studies* 47:4 (2021): 489-507; Lars Waldorf, “Instrumentalising Genocide: The RPF’s Campaign against ‘Genocide Ideology,’” in Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, eds., *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, USA, 2011): 48-66.

themselves as a way to forefront the tensions between translating personal trauma to national policy narratives.

Though the book's project is undoubtedly ambitious and novel, a nod to the rich tome of existing literature covering cases of mass violent memory across the Americas, Africa and Asia would have been useful, if only to position the work further and highlight its unique angle and contributions. Indeed, more could have been done to bring in literature that directly connects violent memory to the political, exploring the "postwars of the dead."² Recently, influential work by Maria Mälksoo explores the links between memory of violence and ontological security in select European case studies and work by David Mwambari has explored the emergence of collective memory in Rwanda's post-genocide international relations.³ A rich tome of critical literature on transitional justice has also looked at ways in which memory of violence is processed, performed and becomes part and parcel of the political process. There is now a sizeable tome of literature on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), or Rwanda's *gacaca* courts, where trauma and politics, including international politics, are tightly intertwined.⁴ Last but not least, the literature on "rebel-to-ruler" transitions directly explores the ways in which post-war governments deploy memories of combat and violence to shape not only their policies, but the very nature of the state and political regime.⁵ All in all, more in-depth engagement with war and peace studies literature, and more specifically peacebuilding, memory, and transitional justice literature would surely temper the claim that "the collective psychological, social, and political long-term suffering imposed by mass violence has too long been neglected by the IR discipline" (15).

Despite the rich exploration of a number of different cases, Lerner's book is not a comparative exercise per se, and does not position itself that way. There is no systematic exploration of differences and similarities between, for example, what Lerner calls Israel's "victim nationalism" and India's autarky policies. These are offered as exploratory cases to trace trauma's effects at the level of international politics. Similarly, the book does not claim to offer a theory of trauma's power, the circumstances under which it is activated, and its differing effects depending on the nature of violence committed, the positioning and power of victims in the political system, or the nature of the regional and international system in which a given state sits.

² Richard Werbner, "Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun: Postwars of the Dead, Memory and Reinscription in Zimbabwe," in Richard Werbner, ed., *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998): 71-102.

³ Maria Mälksoo, "Militant Democracy in International Relations: Mnemonical Status, Anxiety, and Memory Laws in Eastern Europe," *Review of International Studies* 47:4 (2021): 489-507; Mälksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security," *Security Dialogue* 46:3 (2015): 221-237; David Mwambari, "Emergence of Post-Genocide Collective Memory in Rwanda's International Relations," in Elijah Nyaga Munyi, David Mwambari, and Aleksis Ylönen, eds., *Beyond History: African Agency in Development, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020): 119-134.

⁴ See Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa. Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Bert Ingelaere, *Inside Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: Seeking Justice After Genocide* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), Susan Thomson, Rosemary Nagy, "Law, Power and Justice: What Legalism Fails to Address in the Functioning of Rwanda's *Gacaca* Courts", *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5:1(2011): 11-30; Susan Thomson, "The Darker Side of Transitional Justice: The Power Dynamics Behind Rwanda's *Gacaca* Courts," *Africa* 81:3 (2011): 373-390.

⁵ See Terrence Lyons, "The Importance of Winning: Victorious Insurgent Groups and Authoritarian Politics," *Comparative Politics* 48:2 (2016):167-184; Terrence Lyons, "From Victorious Rebels to Strong Authoritarian Parties: Prospects for Post-war Democratization," *Democratization* 23:6 (2016): 1026-1041; Andrea Purdeková, Filip Reyntjens & Nina Wilén, "Militarisation of Governance After Conflict: Beyond the Rebel-to-Ruler Frame—The Case of Rwanda," *Third World Quarterly* 39:1 (2018): 158-174,

The book interestingly looks at cases where memories of mass violence are carried and transplanted elsewhere—whether it is survivors of Holocaust in Israel or returning US soldiers coming back from theaters of war. Despite the many recent cases of mass violence where new governments must grapple with the outfall on their own soil, none of these cases feature in the book. This “displaced trauma” is perhaps a significant factor and an interesting “type” for future exploration, as it could further nuance our understanding of how collective trauma’s power varies across cases. Rather than shortcomings, these are testaments to the rich emerging problematic at hand, and should be tackled in future research.

Moving away from issues of framing, positioning, and case selection, the conceptualization of core terms of memory and trauma could be further elaborated. There are two interconnected points to be made here: one has to do with the relationship between memory and trauma, and the second with the concept of trauma itself. First, the book could have made a greater effort to relate these two key terms. As of now, this relationship is under-theorized in the book. In the chapter on US veterans, for example, Lerner argues that there is firm distinction between “remembering, which involves engaging with past events from a distance. Rather, [trauma] is a form of *re-experiencing*...” (181-182). Indeed, such firm distinction is not always easy to sustain. Memory labor asked of people in truth commissions, trials or museums and commemorations is always an embodied process—it is an engagement that is also often a re-experiencing.⁶ On the flip-side, re-experiencing is memory as in “making the past present.”⁷ But further, it is unclear whether the book itself always uses trauma in the sense of “re-experiencing.” Specifically, it is unclear whether the India case study uses trauma in this sense of re-experiencing of particular harms, or a broader notion of it. In other words, how is psychic suffering and its representation related? Going forward, a more nuanced exploration of these two key terms would be an opening for much-needed broader reflections around these concepts in the discipline.

Second, while the book does an excellent job in uncovering the tensions between individual-level and collective-level trauma, the concept of trauma itself is not sufficiently critically unpacked, especially its medically derived ontological status and, connectedly, the Western origins of this conception.⁸ In many contexts of contemporary mass violence, the “trauma” discourse is not prominent, yet this does not mean that psychic harms and their representation are not studied. For a critical approach to trauma in international politics, it would be useful to not only acknowledge the Western-centricity of trauma study (45) but also extend our conception to alternative understandings of the impacts of violence.

Finally, whereas Lerner sets out to critique the “event” model of mass violence, the project feels unfinished. Trauma is still implicitly positioned as an event with automatic aftershocks, whereas often trauma is in fact a dynamic, ongoing process. The deployment of labels such as “post-traumatic” thus need to be interrogated. There are many structural determinants that might perpetuate/attenuate trauma in the space designated as “post.” Here I merely want to highlight two such key determinants: the transformations of violence, and the making of memory. While physical violence might dissipate in the space of “post-war” or “post-genocide,” it

⁶ See, for example, Karen Brounéus, “Truth-Telling as Talking Cure? Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts,” *Security Dialogue* 39:1 (2008): 55-76; F. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (PhD Dissertation; University of Cape Town, 2002).

⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 35.

⁸ Vanessa Pupavac, “Pathologizing Populations and Colonizing Minds: International Psychosocial Programs in Kosovo,” *Alternatives* 27:4 (2002): 489-511; Alcinda Honwana, “The Collective Body: Challenging Western Concepts of Trauma and Healing,” *Track Two: Constructive Approaches to Community and Political Conflict* 8:1(1999); Derek Summerfield, “Critique of Seven Assumptions Behind Psychological Trauma Programmes in War-Affected Areas,” *Social Science & Medicine* 48:10 (1999): 1449-1462.

might transform into structural violence or the “constitutive” violence of pacification.⁹ The roots of violence might not be resolved, which might perpetuate and feed trauma, especially in contexts of community-based violence where people might live amidst acute fear and with distrust. Further to this, now widespread efforts at transitional justice and confrontations with memory are themselves known to lead to re-traumatization.¹⁰ Lerner’s book does little by way of delving into the core roots of violence, harm, and their transformation. Violence is largely treated as an event rather than a condition that can transform and embed itself in multiple spheres of life even when hostilities end and peace agreements are signed. Representations of violence and trauma themselves participate in the condition of, and the conditioning of, violence. All in all, even the most personal experience of trauma is still structurally determined, and this important dimension of trauma remains uncaptured in the book.

Overall, and by way of conclusion, Lerner’s book undoubtedly offers an important new framework for understanding international politics by positioning trauma at the center of our analysis. Lerner does not only effectively re-describe three important cases of trauma-affected societies by showing trauma’s power in shaping collective identity, governance, and foreign policy, but shows the inherent difficulties in translating painful experiences into collective narratives and representations. Lerner’s book has opened an exciting arena of scholarly inquiry, which will no doubt inspire debate and further research. It deserves to be widely read by scholars of memory and violence, peace and conflict scholars, within and much beyond the IR discipline.

⁹ Ilan Zvi Baron, Jonathan Havercroft, Isaac Kamola, Jonneke Koomen, Justin Murphy, and Alex Prichard, “Liberal Pacification and the Phenomenology of Violence,” *International Studies Quarterly* 63:1 (2019): 199-212.

¹⁰ Karen Brounéus, “Truth-Telling as Talking Cure? Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts,” *Security Dialogue* 39:1 (2008): 55-76.

 Response by Adam B. Lerner, University of Massachusetts Lowell

I want to begin by thanking Fahd Humayun, Raymond I. Orr, and Andrea Purdeková for taking the time to read and reflect on *From the Ashes of History*. I would also like to thank Brent Steele for writing the introduction, as well as a blurb for the book jacket. He has been an inspiration for me throughout my career and I feel lucky to have him joining this roundtable. Finally, I want to thank Andrew Szarejko for putting together this diverse group of discussants, consisting of scholars from such different parts of the political science discipline. My goal in writing the book was to reach scholars across substantive foci and epistomethodological divides. This forum represents exactly the sort of exchange I hoped to foster.

I was delighted, in reading the reviews, to find praise for multiple aspects of the book. However, I'd like to use this space primarily to reflect on the critiques. In my mind, the core critiques identified by the reviewers pull in opposite directions—a balance I was pleased to encounter. My thinking is that, if you can't please everyone, the best alternative is to disappoint everyone equally.¹ Further, bringing these critiques together provides an opportunity for me to reflect on generalization in IR, particularly as it relates to an issue I have been wrestling with in recent months—the relationship between IR and History, both as disciplines, practices, and representatives of divergent epistomethodological traditions in the social sciences and humanities. This relationship frames the book project, though, unfortunately, I did not have space (or enough critical distance) to reflect on it in the book's conclusion. This roundtable provides a perfect opportunity to begin that process.

My book sits in tension between mainstream IR and History.² I identify primarily as an IR scholar,³ and the book's main theoretical argument is very much pitched at the IR discipline. The gap I identify relates to the dominance of the “event model” in mainstream rationalist IR and its shortcomings in addressing the long-term legacy of the mass violence we study. Though I draw on other disciplines' insights to theorize collective trauma, I deliberately frame my goal as demonstrating how the phenomenon shapes the logics of foreign policymaking. Indeed, this is a key point of differentiation between my book and two excellent alternative approaches to collective trauma in IR more focused on trauma as a site of resistance⁴ and trauma's ability to foster “affective communities.”⁵ Though my theoretical framework comes with qualifications regarding case-specific application, it undeniably constitutes a form of generalization that is appropriate to the social sciences. It conceptualizes a phenomenon (collective trauma) and specifies how it can be identified across time and space. Further, it highlights consistent dynamics and tensions within this phenomenon, and then synthesizes a mode of analysis suited to interpreting its impacts across contexts.

On the other hand, my book's empirical chapters, particularly those on India and Israel, are clearly works of history, shaped by the advising of both South Asian historians and historians of political thought at Cambridge. These chapters rely primarily on archival sources; the secondary sources they do cite primarily come from historians; and the narratives they build are framed in ways that speak to historiographic debates. Further, in developing these chapters, I strove to solicit feedback, first and foremost, from historians of the

¹ In that spirit, I am hopeful there are other scholars out there that I have disappointed too....

² My intention here is not to essentialize what are diverse disciplines. Rather, I solely want to highlight the traditions that John Hobson and George Lawson refer to as “mainstream US IR” and “traditional history.” John M. Hobson and George Lawson, “What Is History in International Relations?,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37:2 (2008): 415-35.

³ An international political theorist, if we're being pedantic.

⁴ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵ Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); See also Adam B. Lerner, “Theorizing Collective Trauma in International Political Economy,” *International Studies Review* 21:4 (2019): 549-71.

regions in question. My thinking here was that if the chapters did not pass muster with them, any approval by IR scholars would be chimerical. Though the first part of the book certainly develops a dense theoretical argument, I endeavor to apply my lens with a light touch in the second part, avoiding a procrustean bed of my own making. In this way, my book evinces a historian's resistance to generalization and skepticism of grand theory.

In many ways the three reviews speak to the disciplinary tension at the heart of the book. Fahd Humayun's review offers valid critiques that reflect my book's uncomfortable fit within mainstream political science and its resistance to dominant modes of generalization. He argues that "one might wish that [the book] had been slightly less insistent about not conceptualizing collective trauma systematically," as the book's flexible theorization "limits our understanding of collective trauma to a level of abstraction that precludes effective comparison, even if it allows for classification." He argues that the distance between the cases—particularly the first two on India and Israel and the third on PTSD during the Global War on Terror—raises questions about case-selection criteria and the possibility for comparison. As an example, he argues that had I included a chapter analyzing collective trauma's impact in Pakistan or Bangladesh, I might have better been able to better isolate the impacts of collective trauma and how it interacts with other variables to shape postcolonial states' outcomes.

My response to Humayun's comments is two-sided, hopefully offering paths for scholars of differing epistomethodological orientations and disciplinary backgrounds to take the argument in new, bolder directions, towards their preferred mode of generalization. On the one hand, I would initially parry these critiques by arguing that my book is very much a work of theory building, rather than theory testing or discrete causal identification. When I began the project, I quickly realized that existing scholarship on trauma's collective impacts was simply too expansive and unwieldy to yield a standardized concept that enables the types of comparisons Humayun highlights. The book's initial task was thus to wrangle this literature into a framework that was suitable for IR and, second, to demonstrate this framework's utility across a broad array of cases. Had I adapted collective trauma into a linear causal mechanism, as suggested by this critique, I would have needed to neglect or oversimplify significant research traditions on the subject and thus would not have been able to truly grapple with the tensions inherent to collective trauma that inspire my definition as a "multilevel crisis in representation." The diversity of my book's cases, which come from vastly different contexts, defies the unit homogeneity assumption behind such forms of data collection, comparison, and causal inference. They are thus merely suggestive of the framework's generalizability, an initial demonstration of the framework's potentiality for future scholarship. Those who are interested in understanding collective trauma as a discrete causal mechanism will have additional theoretical work to do in order to adapt my book's lens to this sort of model. I would thus advocate for a healthy division of labor within the discipline between theory development and theory testing and specification—a division that, unfortunately, seems increasingly unlikely given current disciplinary trends away from theory.

On the other hand, my theorization of collective trauma is primarily constitutive, rather than mechanistic. It thus relies on an understanding of causality distinct from that emphasized in literature on small-N case comparison,⁶ making it poorly suited for the type of analysis Humayun suggests. Constitutive theorizing is concerned less with subjecting its findings to counterfactual dependence tests and more with asking "how

⁶ Andrew Bennett, "Case Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages," in Detlef F. Sprinz et al., *Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25:1 (2008): 1-18.

possible” questions surrounding how political discourses engender distinct policymaking logics.⁷ Notably, this does not mean that this sort of analysis is not causal or “merely descriptive.”⁸ Rather, my book seeks to understand how narratives of collective trauma in particular contexts shape a certain type of politics that normalizes and encourages certain types of outcomes, while rendering others unlikely or even unthinkable. In more concrete terms, my analysis of India’s post-independence development regime emphasizes how collective trauma inspired narratives that equated autarkic self-sufficiency with protection from foreign exploitation. Though Pakistan (and, later, Bangladesh) also gained independence following British imperialism, its historical trajectories were sufficiently different that one would expect, if and when collective trauma did emerge as a political force in these states, it would assume a vastly different policymaking logic. My framework is generalizable in the sense that it enables a parallel analysis of collective trauma’s role in Pakistani politics, but not in the sense that it will enable an apples-to-apples comparison to isolate a parallel mechanism producing similar outcomes.

The critiques from Raymond I. Orr and Andrea Purdeková in many ways come from differing positions along the episto-methodological spectrum, reflecting differing positions within political science and their relationship to history. Orr, for example, agrees that trauma is a “particularly messy concept” that makes any effort at distilling an interpretive lens difficult. However, he points to the tendency of my empirical chapters to focus on “elite discourse,” oftentimes at the expense of “the traumatized.” He rightfully calls this the “most sanitary approach to trauma” and notes that it obscures trauma “as a human tragedy.”⁹

Orr’s comments illuminate a worthy direction in which to take the project, but one that would have rendered the specific goal I highlight of connecting collective trauma to foreign policymaking potentially more difficult. Orr is absolutely correct that the most direct and numerous victims of mass violence in the international system are not elites, but subalterns. Highlighting their voices is a worthy project, and I am appreciative of the examples he cites of scholarship that is engaged in this sort of work. Indeed, his work on indigenous politics is an example of how political science can uncover voices obscured by dominant power politics.

Unfortunately, however, the impacts of these victims of mass violence on foreign policymaking are often filtered through elite discourse, justifying my book’s myopia. In this sense, focusing more specifically on marginalized voices could have come at the cost of the project’s ambitions of offering a critique of and contribution to mainstream IR. My book’s primary goal is to demonstrate collective trauma’s role as a foundational, constitutive force in the international system that shapes state identities and patterns of interaction. I interpret Orr’s comments as representing a vital direction in which to take this research agenda—one that moves away from generalization about states towards greater particularism and appreciation of individuals’ diverse experiences of mass violence. I am hopeful that my book serves as an initial proof of concept to encourage this sort of scholarship, rather than yet another closing of IR’s doors to marginalized voices.

By contrast, Purdeková’s core critiques relate less to the book’s empirical focus and more to issues of theoretical specification—areas where additional theoretical discussion might have created a more nuanced lens for analysis. She points to the book’s relatively thin engagement with memory studies and ontological

⁷ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37:3 (September 1993).

⁸ Milja Kurki, “Causes of a Divided Discipline: Rethinking the Concept of Cause in International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Studies* 32:2 (April 2006): 189–216; on the charge of “descriptive research,” see Carolyn E. Holmes et al., “A Case for Description,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* (November 1, 2023): 1–6, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000720>.

⁹ Though I accept this point, I would also note that my chapter on Israel focuses primarily on the testimony of Holocaust survivors at the 1961 Adolf Eichmann trial.

security scholarship, as well as the relative absence of critical scholarship on transitional justice. Further, she rightly points to the need to wrestle with the problematic medicalization of trauma in Western contexts. In many ways, this pathologizing of trauma represents an effort by scholars and practitioners to not only generalize about a diverse array of marginalized people's experiences, but also to manage these experiences in ways suited to the agendas of the powerful.¹⁰ Rather than address the root causes of mass violence in the international system and the injustice inherent to its uneven employment, Western medicalized psychosocial interventions often focus on managing the symptoms of the victims. This often encloses possibilities for bottom-up politics that challenge the political logics that lead to mass violence's recurrence.¹¹

Again, I believe Purdeková has identified valid limitations of the book's theoretical framework and areas for future theoretical development. Indeed, I considered a number of these directions in writing the book but decided against elaborating them for a few reasons. First and foremost, the book is already highly theoretical, including nearly 100 pages outlining its theoretical lens and further theoretical specification guiding each of the case studies and conclusion. I feared drowning the archival research with too much theoretical specification. Second, I have long felt somewhat ambivalent about trauma studies relationship to memory studies literature—a topic I plan to someday explore further. Though trauma is often considered a particular type of memory and even referred to as “traumatic memory,” its ability to produce a crisis in representation that, in many ways, suppresses memory formation, makes it an uneasy fit within memory studies. Despite synergies between the concepts of trauma and memory, I maintain that a theoretical distinction between them is warranted. Third and finally, incorporating additional theoretical nuance threatened to further erode the book's embryonic efforts at generalization—producing a lens adaptable across divergent political contexts. As Humayun notes, only one of the cases comes from the Global South—the US case is firmly situated in the Global North, while the Israel case, I would argue, has unique contours that problematize this distinction. Further efforts to parse how trauma operates differently in the postcolonial world might have further undermined any inchoate efforts at comparison between what are already, quite different cases. Nevertheless, I agree that this is a worthy research agenda for future scholarship.

I am appreciative of all three sets of critiques, not only for exposing me to valid limitations of my work and areas for its future development, but also for pushing me to clarify how I understand the role of generalization in my own work and the type of IR I practice. Though I situate myself firmly in IR, much of my scholarly motivation comes from a love of history—a desire to learn about people who are different from myself and contexts different from my own. I am drawn to archival research, open-ended interviews, and other qualitative methods because they often afford me a glimpse into modes of thinking I might not have considered. Inhabiting this sort of headspace requires deep engagement with history and, often, I worry that efforts at big data collection preclude this sort of scholarship and the empathy it fosters. Nevertheless, I also believe that IR scholarship, in many ways, has an ethical duty to generalize—to reject the radical historicist's relativism which, at its extreme, views efforts to understand, categorize, and compare the unfamiliar as a form of epistemic violence. Though certainly some particularities will remain obscure to the outsider, I maintain that fostering compromises across boundaries requires efforts to identify commonality.¹²

¹⁰ See, for example, the historical and theoretical discussion that begins Lerner, “Blurring the Boundaries of War: PTSD in American Foreign Policy Discourse,” *Perspectives on Politics* 21:2 (2023): 569-86.

¹¹ Purdeková rightfully cites the excellent contributions of Vanessa Pupavac. See Vanessa Pupavac, “Therapeutic Governance: Psycho-Social Intervention and Trauma Risk Management,” *Disasters* 25:4 (2001): 358–72.; Pupavac, “Pathologizing Populations and Colonizing Minds: International Psychosocial Programs in Kosovo,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27:4 (2002): 489-511.

¹² On this point, I am grateful to Oumar Ba for his comments at a roundtable on my book at ISA Northeast's 2023 conference.

Given this tension, I prefer to think of generalization as less a noun and more of a verb—a form of pragmatic reaching out across boundaries that defies the aforementioned tendencies. For scholars representing one extreme of the episto-methodological spectrum, the hunt for social laws often represents an effort to isolate causal mechanisms so finely that agency disappears into a sea of probability distributions. Scholars from the other extreme advocate a form of radical particularism that makes meaningful dialogue across divides more difficult. Both rely on an understanding of generalization that is too rigid for the type of research to which I am drawn.

For me, generalization represents an effort to navigate this divide through ongoing, respectful dialogue on sameness and difference. Theory plays multiple roles in this exercise. On the one hand, it allows us to build concepts and frameworks to facilitate comparisons and recognize commonalities—including common causal mechanisms. On the other, theory provides a lens to illuminate difference and limitations on our understanding. Ultimately, the generalizing dialogue I envision involves deep engagement with both unfamiliar cases and alternative visions of theory. It is dialogic, not monologic, and the dialogue it engenders may often reveal disappointment in problematic characterizations imposed on foreign contexts. However, this dialogue also has the potential to illuminate and cultivate paths forward. Judging by the fruits of this roundtable's fantastic debate, I am optimistic that such a generalizing dialogue will, in the long run, prove productive.