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Reviewed by Kristin B. Waters¹

K. Melchor Quick Hall identifies several key objectives in her text, *Naming A Transnational Black Feminist Framework: Writing in Darkness*. These include providing insight into the role of *ereba*-making as a foodway of the autochthonous Black matrifocal Garifuna people of Honduras; introducing a powerful theoretical framework, Transnational Black Feminism (TBF) as a much-needed corrective for the deficiencies of International Relations (IR); and applying the TBF framework to her research/activism with the Garifuna and to IR more broadly.

In terms of her first objective, Hall spent a year living, working with, and conducting research about the Garifuna people of Honduras in their Caribbean coastal communities, observing, engaging with, and participating in their defining practice of *ereba*-making. Traditionally grown in many African and diasporic cultures, the bitter root crop, cassava, also known as manioc or yucca, requires extensive processing to become edible. Primarily a subsistence food, *ereba* (or cassava bread) is also marketed in nearby towns bringing much-needed economic support to local communities. Social life is structured around those who are the principal *ereba*-makers, typically mature women who exercise considerable authority over decision-making, creation of extended kinship networks, and the distribution of power.

Hall's second objective seems ambitious, introducing TBF, a powerful theoretical framework that serves as a much-needed corrective for the deficiencies of IR as an academic discipline. Despite the wide scope of this goal, Hall, who specializes in IR, not only argues convincingly about the damaging flaws of the discipline but introduces a framework that could well be extended to other social sciences that suffer from similar structural and methodological deficiencies. Thus, far from being overly ambitious, her argument and proposals have implications that invite a much wider application.

Chief among the problems with IR is the premise that the proper subjects of study are interactions between countries and include war, foreign policy, geo-political issues, trade, commerce, and treaties. But, Hall argues, many cultures and practices are best viewed transnationally, without privileging sometimes arbitrary and shifting geopolitical lines. For example, ethnic groups may have cross-border affinities that have little to do with national borders while at the same time being subjected to national policies that are indifferent to their particular conditions. Further, she highlights that IR scholarship may tend to blur the distinctions between internal populations, often to their detriment.

In her discussion, Hall applies her perspective to the Garifuna of Honduras who, "came into being on the island of St. Vincent as a mixture of African people and Carib and Arawak Amerindians" (28). She cites the research findings of Paul Johnson (2005), who attributes three distinct origins to the Garinagu: those who survived the slave shipwrecks in the Eastern Caribbean,

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the self-liberated Maroons who escaped from Barbados, and those captured by Carib incursions into Puerto Rico.¹ From St. Vincent they made their way to the coast of present-day Honduras. Hall writes, “what distinguishes the history typically relayed by the Garifuna people ... is that they identify themselves as one of the few (or the only) African descendants in the Americas who evaded enslavement” (28). And yet, the fact that the Garifuna are Black, not Indigenous and not *mestizo*, has long-term restrictive implications for recognition, respect, land claims, and rights in national law and international courts. Having occupied the Central American coastal land for centuries and employing African cultural memories to create communities that center around cassava cultivation, processing, sustenance, and sale, that is, engaging in activities that might in another context be called “indigenous folkways,” their origin story defies nationalistic as well as standard IR categories, since, as Hall notes, “blackness has been almost entirely excluded from Honduran identity” in a country whose prosperity has been threatened by neoliberal policies, international fruit conglomerates, hurricanes, inadequate land reform and title, and tourism (93).

Hall’s analysis provides a powerful alternative narrative of the region that leads to her TBF framework, the key categories of which are intersectionality, solidarity, scholar/activism, attention to borders/boundaries, and radically transparent author positionality. In traditional scholarship, gender tends to get analytical short shrift amid a focus on the more powerful and privileged. So when Hall singles in on the matrifocality of the Garifuna as one aspect of intersectionality, she reveals the ways that single-story, elite-centered accounts obscure or misconstrue women’s roles.

Applied both specifically to the Garifuna and more broadly to IR (her third objective), the components of TBF are mutually supportive. But Hall rejects the notion that social scientific objectivity requires a disinterested point-of-view. Instead, she encourages transparent ownership of one’s positionality and perspective as a way of understanding the relational nature of knowledge projects. She draws on the impressive body of work by Patricia Hill Collins, particularly, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). Collins’s insights about epistemology, race, and gender are profound and enduring. She stands as one among many feminist theorists of the last half-century who developed sophisticated versions of standpoint epistemologies that make transformative contributions to the social sciences. Identifying and owning standpoints, or subject positions, opens the door to reveal what is often hidden, for example, narratives about who is thought to be suited to what kinds of labor and the imagined benefits of corporate capitalist control. From the standpoint of an international fruit conglomerate, poor, dark-skinned people may be deemed to be more suitable than whites for planting and harvesting, an assessment justified from the perspective of trickle-down neo-liberal economic theory. Conversely, from the standpoint of the Garifuna, traditional cultural practices that preserve existing social structures may be far more desirable than corporatized plantation work.

In Hall’s case, her positionality and solidarity with the community she is studying allows her to reveal her scholar/activism and advocacy. During and following her research, Hall “co-created an awareness-raising and fundraising website about the work of the *ereba*-makers,” spreading the word in conference presentations, and creating a photography book, actions that “constitute a community-informed action, rooted in my access to the resources of the US academy” (52).

Hall critiques the pernicious nature of the dominant “development” models of scholarship and policy. She notes a small but significant strain of critique across the social sciences is focused on the ways the development models universalize and export a Euro-American, Enlightenment concept of society and nation to the detriment of “non-Western” countries and groups in terms of race, gender, and nation. In Honduras and much of Central America, this phenomenon is most

evident in the actions of capitalist enterprises such as the large fruit corporations that have exploited natural and human resources in the name of development.

Several strands of IR make an effort to address the deficiencies of traditional approaches by incorporating considerations of race, gender, and regionalism into their analyses, but, Hall notes, “there is still no Black feminist tradition in IR” (14). For example, Amitav Acharya has called for an approach that attends to regions and regionalism as well as states.ⁱⁱ Among others, Persaud and Walker underscore the need for a deeper analysis of race while Chowdhry and Nair note that race-based analyses “often lack sustained analysis of gender” along with race. (14).ⁱⁱⁱ A Black feminist critique recognizes that global interactions must be studied in an inclusive way, embracing nuanced gender relations and the power dynamics, not just of elites but also of the marginalized and underserved and, for Hall, dynamics that are specifically raced and gendered. She writes, “the TBF framework is intended as a direct confrontation, a historical reckoning” (15).

This commitment carries with it a demand to consider other dimensions of IR, ethical, ontological, epistemological, and social in a world of immense inequality faced with massive social change. In terms of the ethical dimensions, Hall’s book falls in well with recent publications in philosophy such as Serene J. Khader’s *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (2019), Margaret A. McLaren’s edited collection, *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization* (2017), McLaren’s, *Women’s Activism, Feminism, and Social Justice* (Oxford, 2019) which focuses primarily on India, and Kris F. Sealey’s *Creolizing the Nation* (2020) all of which grapple with the complexities of honoring diverse subjects and communities while retaining the ability to create a unified response to ethical problems.

By reaching across disciplines, Hall’s book centers a long-overlooked reality of Black feminism. Traditionally the social sciences and humanities have viewed Black feminism primarily as a US or North American phenomenon, located on the periphery of more varied approaches world-wide. Mainstream scholarship in IR and other disciplines often miss the ideological reach and global practices related to gender and anti-Black racism rooted in the trafficking of Africans into slavery. TBF recognizes that anti-Black ideologies originating in Euro-American Enlightenment thought are not limited to Europe and the Americas, but have been universally exported, making the methodological tools of TBF essential on a broader plane. The ideologies of anti-Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian gendered racism have seeped into every crevice of thought and practice across the globe. For example, Hall addresses issues of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) in Honduras in the formation/construction of racial and social categories. One might also recognize that this is a global phenomenon stemming from Western ideologies of race fueled by capitalist marketing for example, in Asia where the sale of dangerous “whitening” products thrives in response to the ideologies of whiteness. These ideologies also erase the international political campaigns of Black women such as those explored by Keisha N. Blain in *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (2018) and others in the growing field of Black women’s internationalism.^{iv} These cross-disciplinary connections are essential for the enrichment and transformation of scholarship in the future.

It follows that readers from a variety of disciplines will benefit from this book which should not be dismissed or overlooked as having a “narrow” focus on a particular raced/classed/gendered group in a particular country and region. *Naming a Transnational Black Feminist Framework* is intended to engage across disciplines and model future research. In this light, it becomes apparent that while Hall’s book could be adopted for courses on Caribbean or Latin American history, literature, philosophy, political science, or international relations, or in Black feminist theory, her framework has global—or better still—transnational implications. While traditional IR scholars

may find much about this work to critique, those working to transform IR, those engaging in transnational feminism, as well as those interested in a respectful analysis of the Garifuna will be amply rewarded.

ⁱ Paul Christopher Johnson (2005) “Migrating Bodies, Circulating Signs: Brazilian Candomblé, the Garifuna of the Caribbean and the Category of Indigenous Religions,” in *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocations*, edited by Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson, Jr., 37-51. Burlington VA: Ashgate.

ⁱⁱ Hall cites Acharya Amitav (2011) “Dialogue and Discovery: In Search of International Relations Theories Beyond the West.” *Millennium* 39(3): 619-637 and 2015, “Professor Acharya Delivered the Presidential Address to the 55th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Hall cites Randolph B. Persaud and R. B. Walker (2001) “Apertura: Race in International Relations.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, and Political* 26(4): 373-376 and Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (2004) “Introduction: Power in a Postcolonial World: Race, Gender, Class in International Relations.” In *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class*. Edited by Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair. 1-32. London: Routledge.

^{iv} For a brief but helpful list of other books in this genre see <https://www.aaihs.org/black-womens-internationalism/>