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Forum on Inclusion and Exclusion in Global Security Studies

Pushing the Boundaries: Can We "Decolonize" Security Studies?

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Abstract

This essay reflects on the approaches to inclusion and exclusion put forward in this special issue and suggests a more radical alternative: the project of "decolonizing" the field of security studies. Drawing on work in decolonial thought and critical security studies, I discuss systemic-level structures of inclusion and exclusion such as global racial hierarchies, imperial and colonial legacies, and North-South inequities. Such structures both shape the material reality of the global security order, and affect knowledge production in the field of security studies itself, including the definition of what is and is not viewed as a legitimate "security issue." I conclude by asking what a "decolonized" security studies might look like.

Keywords: exclusion/inclusion, security, decolonial thought, race, empire, migration, sovereignty

Introduction

As the call for this special issue noted, "[n]otions of exclusion form the backbone of traditional security studies, which is built around protecting "us" against "them" and assumes the existence of an enemy or another hostile aggressor who must be kept at bay."[1] Mainstream approaches to security studies often start with the assumption that it is the borders of the state that define the line between "us" and "them." In a hostile and anarchic world, states seek to protect their own citizens from external "others." The articles in this special issue, however, paint a more nuanced picture of how dynamics of inclusion and exclusion relate to global security, by drawing our attention to issues of: gender (Henshaw 2019; Spindel and Ralston 2019); refugees (Chu 2019);

1 *Journal of Global Security Studies*, "Call for Proposals: *JoGSS* Special Issue on Exclusion, Inclusion and Global Security," accessed September 14, 2019, https://academic.oup.com/jogss/pages/call_for_proposals.

religion (Mateson 2019); nationalism (Valentino and Sagan 2019); and human security (Benzing 2019). As such, they go far beyond mainstream approaches in theorizing how dynamics of inclusion and exclusion impact on security. Yet, do they go far enough?

In this essay, I reflect on the approaches to inclusion and exclusion put forward in this special issue and suggest a more radical alternative: the project of "decolonizing" the field of security studies. I distinguish between "problem-solving" and "critical" approaches to the study of inclusion and exclusion, in which the former focus on diversifying existing structures, whereas the latter focus on transforming the structures themselves (Cox 1981). Drawing on work in decolonial thought and critical security studies, I discuss some additional systemic-level structures of inclusion and exclusion that have not been covered in the articles in this issue, such as global racial hierarchies, imperial and colonial legacies, and North-South inequities. These forms of inclusion and exclusion simultaneously shape the material reality

of the global security order, while also affecting knowledge production in the field of security studies itself. Collectively, they help to determine what is and what is not seen as a legitimate "security issue." Finally, I ask what a "decolonized" security studies might look like.

Inclusion and Exclusion: Problem-Solving vs Critical Approaches

Reflecting on the attacks of 9/11 and the impending US-led War in Iraq, Steve Smith, in his 2003 Presidential Address to the International Studies Association, argued that International Relations (IR) scholars are "complicit in the constitution of this world of international relations," asserting that "the discipline has helped to sing into existence the world…by reflecting the interests of the dominant in what were presented as being neutral, and universal theories" (Smith 2004, 499). He went on to provocatively argue that scholars of IR held some share of culpability in world events because of what the discipline excluded or ignored—structural violence, economic inequality, and gender and racial injustices—all of which were issues viewed as lying outside the core concerns of the discipline. Urging scholars to beware of "political assumptions masquerading as technical ones," he went on to reflect on how the theories and methods that scholars use are closely connected to their own position within the global system (Smith 2004, 503).

More than a decade and a half later, the essential point of Smith's address—that the assumptions, categories, and language that we use to describe and understand the world also construct and constitute it—is still relevant, and forms an important starting point for thinking about dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in global security (studies). Although IR and security studies are less beholden to grand theories and paradigms than they were a decade and a half ago, many of the critiques that Smith lobbed at the discipline are nevertheless still salient. Global hierarchies of race, class, and gender, and the continuing influence of imperial and colonial legacies, are yet to be fully confronted and engaged within the discipline. Furthermore, security studies is almost silent on issues such as the global climate change emergency (Goldstein 2016).

As Hazelton notes in her contribution to this symposium, the majority of the articles in this special issue focus on the policy effects and security outcomes of inclusion and exclusion. This fits squarely within what Cox (1981) referred to as a "problem-solving" framework, which takes existing structures as given while seeking to solve problems that arise within them. Hendrix notes that the case studies in this issue use different concep-

tualizations and proxies of inclusion and exclusion, including representational, processual, and outcome-oriented. Moreover, many of the articles are underpinned by liberal assumptions about the security benefits of inclusion—an assumption that is partially challenged by both Hazelton and Hendrix in this forum. The empirical focus of the articles—on refugees (Chu 2019), gender (Spindel and Ralston 2019; Henshaw 2019), religious actors (Mateson 2019), and the micro-foundations of human security (Benzing 2019)—are certainly "inclusive" to the extent that they all travel well beyond "traditional" approaches to security that have focused on the interests and grand strategies of powerful nation-states. Indeed, they draw attention to constituencies that have often been excluded and marginalized within the field of security studies, such as women (Henshaw 2019), transgender individuals (Spindel and Ralston 2019), Islamic parties (Mateson 2019), and noncombatant civilians (Valentino and Sagan 2019). With the notable and important exception of Benzing's contribution, however, the contributions as a whole tend toward a focus on causal explanations of how dynamics of inclusion and exclusion play out in particular cases, rather than on a broader critical project that seeks to understand issues of inclusion and exclusion in global and systemic-level terms (see also Widdick, this issue).

For example, Spindel and Ralson importantly examine practices of inclusion and exclusion in the US military, but they do not, however, seek to open up discussions about or reflect on deeper questions about militarism, militarization, or US hegemony; Chu examines the ways in which state rivalries lead to more or less inclusive approaches to refugees, but she does not seek to call into question the processes and assumptions that construct the administrative category of "refugee;" Valentino and Sagan survey the extent to which US citizens value the lives of foreign civilians versus US military personnel, yet they do not seek to call into question the underlying logics of nationalism and national imaginaries; Henshaw examines the exclusion of women from Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes, yet she does not seek to critically interrogate the emergence of DDR as a key component in post-conflict peacebuilding; Mateson examines the security effects of excluding or repressing Islamist opposition groups, but does not necessarily aim to dissect the histories and structures that have produced such groups. The point here is not to critique individual articles—which all present important arguments that push the agenda of security studies forward in interesting ways. Rather, it is to use the opportunity that this special issue presents to contrast a "problem-solving" approach to the study of exclusion

and inclusion with more radical and critical approaches. One such approach would be a "decolonial" approach, which provides an alternative perspective on inclusion and exclusion in global security studies.

Applying a Decolonial Lens to Security Studies

Decolonial theory has gained traction in the humanities and is slowly entering the social sciences, including IR theory (Chakrabarty 2000; Jones 2006; Mignolo 2012; Rao 2013; Capan 2017; Weiner 2018). The very language of decolonization suggests a more substantive critique of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and how they operate in the study of global security. Indeed, post-colonial and decolonial approaches to IR form a type of "deep theorizing" that exists on a par with realism or liberalism (Berenskoetter 2018). A decolonial lens on the field begins with the observation that entrenched and deeply rooted social and political hierarchies based on exclusionary practices shape both geopolitics and the production of knowledge, with particular attention to global hierarchies of race, as well as imperial and colonial histories (including settler colonialism in North America and elsewhere). These hierarchies have both shaped and coexist with the formal structures of international relations (such as states, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations) and constitute an additional layer of power relations and forms of exclusion that often remain invisible in mainstream approaches to security.

For example, the erasure of race from IR occurred in the post-1945 period when there was a switch from a study of global race relations, colonialism, empire, and "civilizations," to a focus on "states" (Vitalis 2015). What W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) referred to as the "global color line" disappeared as an object of analysis in IR, with race being almost invisible as a salient factor in security studies (Doty 1993; Jones 2008; Nisancioglu 2019). A more trenchant critique would argue that security studies suffers from the problem of "methodological whiteness" (Bhambra 2017). This means that, not only is race made invisible, but also the security effects of race—such as racialized violence and the legacies of colonial histories—are not defined as "security issues" (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019). With few exceptions, IR and security scholars have not engaged with global issues of policing, criminal justice, incarceration, or movements such as Black Lives Matter.[2] A focus on the state and the attachment to nationalism as a primary identity (see also

Hendrix, this issue) draws attention away from other cross-cutting identities and solidarities, such as transnational solidarity movements based on race or religion, including movements such as black internationalism (Daulatzai 2012; Munro 2017; Blain 2018).

In addition to the erasure of race, contemporary security studies has focused more on the projection of power by powerful actors than its effects on the less powerful. Security studies is still a US-dominated discipline, and decision-making in Washington DC is its primary reference point. English language journals are filled with policy-relevant articles geared to the maximization of US power, not how other states and non-state actors can best contain or resist US power (Adamson 2016, 21). Classic security studies' case studies, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, are seen through the lens of actors in Washington rather than Washington's adversaries or targets (Laffey and Weldes 2008). Topics such as humanitarian intervention are approached more often from the intervener's perspective than that of those in the state targeted for intervention (Sabaratnam 2017). Security studies has largely marginalized perspectives on world events that derive from a Global South position (Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Acharya 2014). For example, studies of World War II regularly ignore their racial and colonial dimensions, including the roles played by black troops in the United States and colonial troops in Britain (Krebs 2006; Barkawi 2016, 2017). Security studies scholarship on the global war on terrorism has focused more on strategies that policymakers could take to prevent terrorism than the impact of those strategies on vulnerable communities or the experiences of those caught up in the global counterterrorism infrastructure (Khalili 2013).

Similarly, studies of migration and security have often prioritized state interests and strategies over the impact of state policies on migrants and potential migrants (Adamson 2006; Greenhill 2010). A decolonial lens brings in other vantage points and pays greater attention to the historical contexts and structures within which migration flows are embedded (Andersson 2014; Chomsky 2014; Buettner 2016). This may necessarily require a calling into question of accepted notions of sovereignty, as well as the centrality of the state as a privileged unit in security studies (Goddard and Nexon 2016). Achiume (2019), for example, has presented a vision of co-sovereignty, based on the existence of neocolonial power relations that form a global demos that transcends individual states. The argument is that the experience of colonialism created a level of North-South entanglement such that "Third World peoples are culturally co-nationals with First World peoples" and are "already part of the 'self' that determines the

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2   Although on policing, see Laffey and Weldes (2005), Laffey and Nadarajah (2016), and Danewid (2019).

ex-colonizing nations, because they are essential contributors to its identity" (Achiume 2019, 1,549; Amighetti and Nuti 2016, 548). Colonial relations create mutually constituted national identities in which the borders of the state do *not* determine relationships of inclusion and exclusion. Making an argument for the right to migrate based on an alternative logic of "sovereignty as interconnection," Achiume notes that if one accepts that the current order is a neocolonial order, one must also accept that the locus of that order lies in powerful states in the Global North. Within this context, citizens of the Global South are "in effect, political insiders, and for this reason, First World nation-states have no right to exclude Third World persons" (Achiume 2019, 1,549, 1,574). In this vision, international migration is conceptualized as a form of ongoing decolonization—a move that reconfigures territorial notions of inclusion and exclusion that dominate state-centric approaches to IR.

A focus on migration provides further avenues for investigating historical relationships of empire, colonialism, and state-building that are often missing in more ahistorical approaches to security studies. The study of migration in the context of nation-building, for example, opens up the "black box" of the state and shows how processes of inclusion and exclusion were at the heart of state formation. The creation of collective national identities was often a violent process accompanied by mass displacement and the generation of large numbers of refugees (Zolberg 1983; Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). Indeed, international organizations in many cases facilitated and encouraged population displacements (Robson 2017). Furthermore, the transition from empire to state in much of the world disrupted entrenched systems of trans-territorial belonging that had emerged in which millions of people across the globe were connected with each other as imperial subjects in "empire states" (Klotz 2013; Cooper 2018). The dismantling of empires, the migration of peoples, and other forms of global entanglements are still topics that are largely excluded from security studies—the discipline is yet to have its "global history" moment.

Yet, these histories matter for understanding contemporary security orders. The linear borders of territorial states can be contrasted with imperial security orders that relied on other, non-territorial, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Goettlich 2019). For example, within empires there is a greater reliance on formal internal boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, such as the internal differentiation based on religion that was found within the Ottoman *millet* system or the multiple gradations of citizenship and subject that characterized European empire-states (Cooper 2005; Barkey 2008; Mamdani 2018). In

the case of the French empire in Algeria, a strong differentiation was made between the *territory* of Algeria (which was considered an integral part of France) and the *population* of Algeria (which, with the exception of the colonial *pieds noirs*, was considered to be largely excluded from the French nation) (Gulley 2018). Arguably, more modern cases of internal state systems of exclusion—from the apartheid system in South Africa, to racialized practices of incarceration in the United States, to the presence of large numbers of undocumented migrants within states who live without formal rights (Bosniak 2008)—have resonances with earlier cases of colonial control and provide examples of exclusionary state practices that are often considered to be outside the purview of security studies. Not only are large numbers of people who live within the physical borders of states excluded from full membership due to their legal status, but also the very structure of the international states system produces categories of excluded populations such as refugees, nomadic populations, and stateless and indigenous peoples (Haddad 2008).

The "decolonial" literature in IR suggests that there are broader issues of inclusion and exclusion in security studies that provide opportunities to ask difficult questions. Vitalis (2015, 1), for example, asks why it is that students interested in issues of race and racial justice do not gravitate towards the study of IR. Why have the vibrant debates on race, colonialism, and indigeneity that have marked fields such as global history, cultural studies, and anthropology not found their way to the center of the field of security studies? Do such omissions also lead to exclusion in terms of those who choose to study issues of security, thus making the field less representative of how differently placed individuals experience and define "security"?

Toward a "Decolonized" Security Studies?

Is it possible to create a field of security studies that is "decolonized," so to speak, and attuned to the multiple forms of power relations that affect everyday security practices—beyond those embedded in powerful states? In this essay, I have suggested that it is worth exploring "decolonial" perspectives as an alternative means of shedding light on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in global security. Decolonial approaches focus on transforming structures, rather than simply diversifying them, and provide an alternative to more "problem-solving" approaches to inclusion and exclusion. The literature on decolonial theory and its application is vast, and this brief commentary has only touched on some representative arguments in a somewhat superficial manner. Nevertheless,

it is worth asking to what extent incorporating principles of decoloniality could open up broader discussions on "inclusion" and "exclusion" in ways that might help transform the field.

Security studies, perhaps more than any other field, has had a close link with the policy interests (and worldviews) of the most powerful. Decolonial approaches provide a means of shedding further light on this, by examining how and why the field legitimizes some voices while silencing others. A decolonial lens provides the means of excavating the history of such exclusions, by pointing to their connection with unresolved colonial, racial, and imperial histories. A number of decolonial scholars have provided practical guidance on how to promote more inclusive conversations in IR and security studies in ways that would expand who "speaks" in the discipline (see, e.g., Sabaratnam 2011). Yet, decolonial approaches have also been criticized for the way they can also reproduce the very colonial categories and hierarchies that they challenge, rather than move beyond them (Murray 2019). This has led some to connect decolonial approaches with the need to move to a more planetary form of politics and collective solidarity, in which the underlying logic is one of entanglement, interdependence, and dialogue, rather than binary forms of inclusion and exclusion (Stengers 2010; Burke et al. 2016; Conway 2019). Such strategies may be increasingly necessary under rapidly changing conditions of technological change and planetary environmental destruction. For example, the rise of big data and the increased role that algorithms play in shaping the lifeworlds of individuals lead to a type of universal "colonization" of life by technology in ways that decolonial approaches can help to shed light on.[3] Similarly, the notion of the Anthropocene can be seen as being characterized by the colonization of nature by humans, in ways that actively exclude and threaten the security of many of the nonhuman inhabitants of the planet. Clearly, there is still a long way to go in the task of theorizing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in global security studies. This special issue, however, has made an important step forward in raising the question, and in bringing to the fore cases that address issues of gender, religion, national identity, and refugees. The question the special issue ultimately leaves us with is: What other forms of exclusion

may we still be blind to, and how can we begin the process of excavating and addressing them?

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3 See, e.g., Bangstad, Sindre, and Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen, 2019, "Thoughts on the Planetary: An Interview with Achille Mbembe." *New Frame*, September 5, 2019, accessed September 28, 2019, https://www.newframe.com/thoughts-on-the-planetary-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/ and Hershock (1999, 67ff).

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