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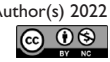

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Worlding war as a primary institution of international society

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Abstract

Through interaction with decolonial IR this paper develops a research agenda extending recent English School (ES) work engaging a Global IR agenda. It argues recent developments in ES work that look to world history and which substantially improve ES accounts of "primary institutions" of international society can be further enhanced by decolonial concepts and methods. By focusing on war as a major primary institution of international society, and specifically Counterinsurgency and Counter-Terrorism, the paper shows how "worlding" as a decolonial approach can extend ES theory's critical reach. Key benefits include enriching its account of political space and identifying ways to open research to perspectives and insights from marginalized populations with deep knowledge and understanding of war through lived experience. Decolonial research methods and associated distinctive ontological and epistemological claims can open ES research to additional world histories its present methods close, further invigorating the principal sociological approach to theorizing international relations.

Keywords

Counter insurgency, counter terrorism, decolonial theory, drones, English school, primary institutions

Introduction

This paper argues English school (ES) IR theory can and should pursue a theoretically and methodologically more radical approach to its centerpiece concept of the society of states, or international society. Specifically, it should extend existing engagement with "Global IR" (Acharya, 2014) to include decolonial approaches to open new epistemological, ontological, and methodological opportunities for analyzing international society's origins,

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development, operation, and normativity. Through an initial examination of war as one of the English school's most important primary institutions, I suggest how decolonial work can generate powerful insights into how war has functioned and continues to function in international society to create distinctive, hierarchical, and deeply colonial forms of political space. These spaces, taking diverse forms, including practical, epistemological, and methodological, can drive reconsideration of international society's ontological status, and a sense of how to augment ES theory's existing strengths creating an analytical framework encompassing plural, and pluriversal, international societ(y/ies). Inevitably, one paper cannot do complete justice to such an agenda, especially through a focus on a single primary institution, but I can establish its persuasiveness and importance.

Acharya and Buzan (2017: 352–353) note ES theory's potential to play a leading role in Global IR. This fruitful partnership engages world history and historiography in ES theory, producing substantial discussion of non-Western forms of international society (e.g. Barry et al., 2015; Buzan, 2014b; Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018; Clark, 2017; Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017a; Pella, 2015; Phillips, 2016; Zhang, 2011; Zhang and Buzan, 2012). Key elements of the Global IR agenda reinforce ES accounts of a historically contingent and dynamic international society constituted through a shifting pattern of primary institutions, often demonstrating regional distinctiveness.

The concept of primary institutions is central to 20 years of ES theoretical development, clarifying what primary institutions are, how they emerge and decline, their relationship to secondary institutions, and how to assess strengthening and weakening dynamics within international society (e.g. Buzan, 2004; Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018; Falkner and Buzan, 2019; Knudsen and Navari, 2019; Navari, 2020; Spandler, 2015). An important part of this conceptual refinement has been empirical analysis of international political practices overturning previously dominant "diffusionist" accounts of international society's globalization (e.g. Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017a). Briefly, in this account, primary institutions developed in Europe, pristine and uninfluenced by the outside world, between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, except those recovered from classical European civilizations. They were exported to non-European societies, replacing what had previously existed to such an extent there is little worth knowing about pre-European regional international societies. The post-1945 process of decolonization completed the long transition to a single, global international society. New work acknowledges the role of violence, racism, and colonialism in the "diffusion," and the extent to which European institutions borrowed from non-European systems and how pre- and post-colonial patterns, institutions, and practices create regional distinctiveness (e.g. Keene, 2002; O'Hagan, 2017; Pella, 2015; Phillips, 2016, 2017; Rae, 2017). The first part of this paper looks at this work, drawing out theoretical conclusions about primary institutions, that, I argue, are neglected in the current ES-Global IR engagement. This explains why political space is an important, if neglected, topic in ES theory and how, as noted by Blaney and Tickner (2017: 294–295) following Acharya's Global IR approach perpetuates a *uni*-verse, or "one-world world" account.

Part two addresses the primary institution of war as emblematic of limitations and opportunities for ES theory in engaging decolonial approaches. War is a good choice for two reasons, one general, the other specific to my argument. The general reason is war's ubiquity in lists of primary institutions and its centrality to the concept of international

society. War, and other forms of organized political violence, are central to ES analysis because of the dangers war raises and the seriousness of the analytical and ethical questions it poses. It also interacts with other, similarly ubiquitous, primary institutions, including diplomacy, sovereignty, and international law. "Worlding" war suggests how other ubiquitous primary institutions could be reconsidered. There is unavoidable artificiality in analyzing primary institutions in isolation, because, for example, what war is invokes legal argument, and who can wage war involves accounts of sovereignty. Whilst noting this at appropriate places below, practical constraints of space mean a multi-(primary) institutional account is impossible. The specific reason is how the principal manifestation of Western-led forms of war this century—forms of Counter Insurgency (COIN) and Counter Terrorism (CT)—are especially useful for drawing out embedded colonial and imperial legacies in policy, practice and theorization (e.g. Gregory, 2011a; Keal, 2017; Niva, 2013; O'Hagan, 2020; Shaw, 2013). That helps show how more radical analyses drawing on decolonial methods and forms of social theory can "world" war as a step toward a much larger project.

As discussed further below, war as a primary institution constitutes agents and agency. It legitimizes social practices understandable as contemporary manifestations of methodologies, concepts, and epistemologies indebted to colonialism and its distinctive construction of political space. War does this in especially powerful ways. Constructing political space was obviously a central component of colonialism, yet ES theory neglects space. Limited existing ES discussions of space that engage political geography suggest this is a fruitful theoretical and conceptual dialog (Williams, 2006) which this paper advances. Furthermore, spatial metaphors are commonplace in decolonial work, reinforcing the specific claim that war is a good primary institution to focus on in making this case via the importance of the specific spaces of violence war establishes and legitimizes, and how it populates those spaces with distinctive agents and forms of agency. The idea of a pluriversal account of war in this instance, and of international society more generally, also draws on a spatial metaphor, pointing toward a decolonially-influenced analysis revealing the simultaneously multiple manifestations of war's ontology, epistemology, and ways war is experienced. Rejecting the one-world world account that needs to privilege one of these as the "correct" one, I argue for multiple validities.

My goal is to establish a theoretical beachhead, to use a consciously war-like and spatial metaphor, for a pluriversal analysis of war. I concentrate on how the US as the lynchpin of COIN and CT doctrinal development and operationalization because it has led these developments, attracting sustained analysis in line with ES theory's typical focus on leading players in international society. Whilst many other states have pursued COIN and CT operations, and its emblematic technology—Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS or drones)—has proliferated rapidly, the limits of a single paper make it impractical to offer sustained empirical discussion of other examples. Striking, though, is other states' mimicry of US language (e.g. Rotaru, 2019), claiming and reinterpreting concepts originated by the US, albeit often for notably different purposes. There is a subversion of COIN/CT here, but that is different from a decolonization of COIN/CT because it does not call into question deeper ontological and epistemological issues that are my main concern.

Analyzing COIN and CT, and spaces and technologies of violence, leads to the final section deploying decolonial social theory and identifying decolonial research methods

for renewed and distinctive engagement with ES analyses. Established ES work epistemologically privileges elite perspectives and assumes a singular ontology of international society. "Worlding" war is an important step in an ES research agenda incorporating decolonial methodologies, techniques, and perspectives as a complement to the existing re-engagement with world history and willingness to critique historical and historiographical methods of previous ES theorists. International societ(y/ies) creates new, pluriversal analytical opportunities for ES theory more attuned to how the creation of the political space of international society functions to privilege and punish, include, and exclude, in ways presently analytically absent.

The English school and primary institutions

Core to ES accounts of international society are primary institutions understood as:

> . . . deep and relatively durable social practices in the sense of being more evolved than designed. These practices must not only be shared amongst the members of international society, but also be seen amongst them as legitimate behaviour. Primary institutions are thus about the shared identity of the members of international society. They are constitutive of both states and international society in that they define not only the basic character of states but also their patterns of legitimate behaviour in relation to each other, and the criteria for membership of international society. (Buzan, 2014a, 16-17)

This definition enables social structural institutional analysis considering long-run trends in successful evolutionary mutations (Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018). Importantly, agency remains. The evolutionary analogy must not be overstretched, suggesting international society's contemporary form is "natural." ES theory is skeptical of, even hostile toward, teleological historical claims (Friedner Parrat, 2020). International society's specific form and the functions of its primary institutions are contingent upon unpredictable choices made by specific agents.

Twenty years of sustained research have transformed ES theorization of "institutions," driven by greater methodological sophistication (Buzan, 2004; Buzan and Schouenborg, 2018; Knudsen and Navari, 2019; Schouenborg, 2017; Spandler, 2015). Bevir and Hall (2020a) summarize this via distinguishing between a "modernist social science" approach, led by Buzan, connecting ES to US-led social constructivist theorizing, and more "interpretive" approaches closer to the "classical method" of earlier ES theorists including Martin Wight and Hedley Bull. Modernist social science enables macro-level ES theorizing of international society, identifying key points of historical change, sustaining comparative analysis of international societies operating at different scales in different locations, and helping explain why some locally originated international societies became more extensive, including globalization of a European mode between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Buzan, 2004; Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Buzan and Little, 2001). "Interpretive" methodology drawing on concepts of "practice" and anthropological analysis linked to Grounded Theory explore how practitioners produce and reproduce behaviors that manifest, disperse, and change behavioral norms providing institutions with specific content, organize interactions, and manifest contestation (e.g. Friedner Parrat, 2020; Navari, 2011, 2020; Wilson, 2012).

Common to both and consistent across the distinction (characterizing it as a divide is a false dichotomy), is commitment to understanding what institutions are, how they operate to constitute actors with shared standards and behavioral expectations, and how they interact in response to diverse inputs. Central from Bull's (1977) work onward is how specific institutions inter-relate to create the overall pattern, character, and durability of international order. Cross-historical and cross-regional comparative studies of institutions increase awareness of non-Western history (Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Buzan and Little, 2001; Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017b, c.f. Hobson, 2004, 2012), highlighting how choices about historical representation have analytical and normative effects (Bain, 2009; Bevir and Hall, 2020b; Green, 2020; Wilson, 2012).

Both these methodological positions focus on elite actors within international society. This is hardly unique in IR theorizing, of course. World history's centrality to Global IR better represents non-Western societies, challenging biased, or plain inaccurate, accounts of the expansion and entrenchment of a Western-led international society (e.g. Acharya, 2016; Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Hobson, 2004). However, English school world history typically adopts the viewpoint from the top of those non-Western polities (Williams, 2021: 143, 150–155). Furthermore, modernist social science and interpretive methods may be distinctive in what they analyze and how they do it, but they share a one-world world ontology of the singularity of the international society that exists at a particular time in a particular place.

Other aspects of Global and decolonial IR stress non-Western epistemologies and consequent opportunities to represent alternative perspectives via their own categories, criteria, language, concepts, and knowledge forms (e.g. Acharya, 2019; Eun, 2018, 2021; Hobson and Sajed, 2017; Hutchings, 2019; Ling and Nordin, 2019; Qin, 2016; Shahi and Ascione, 2016). That establishes my first claim: the potential for forms of social theory central to decolonial historical analysis to not just offer different perspectives on this richer empirical account of international society's development and expansion. They can substantially alter how we understand international society's ontology, and establish how ES epistemologies exclude, and not just marginalize, non-elite perspectives. That taps into pluriversal accounts that see ontology as a central question for IR theory (Blaney and Tickner, 2017). Richer, better histories of international society and its primary institutions are one thing, but they limit ES theory's potential engagement with decolonial forms of Global IR because they inadequately address how we theorize primary institutions in ways that insulate them from these analytical forms via an embedded elitism ES theory is not, yet, addressing fully. They can move us beyond a "one-world world" international society toward a pluriversal account of international societ(y/ies) where multiple political spaces in international society come into sharper focus. Looking at war as a primary institution begins that process. The potential of a decolonial ES takes shape.

War as a core institution of international society

Focusing on war shows how critically and decolonially influenced approaches challenge Buzan and Schouenborg's (2018: 77, 88) claim that war is being marginalized in some parts of the world. That may be true in terms of war's occurrence, but, I argue, less so in how particular forms of war create political spaces that legitimize actors and actions

perpetuating established dominance. At the macro level, war's legitimate function in international society is classically portrayed as two-fold. Firstly, as a (risky) mechanism for preserving international society from radical, international society-threatening, political projects. Secondly, as enabling specific states to defend themselves, whether against such projects or other states' aggrandizing ambitions. Bull (1977: Ch. 8) portrays limiting war's social acceptability as one of international society's most important functions. Others, such as Jackson, following Bull's lead, are skeptical of widening permissible bases for war, for example, via humanitarian intervention (e.g. Jackson, 2000: Ch. 10).

Restricting access to war in international society seems self-evident: war's benefits are extremely limited and exceptionally uncertain. Its costs are severe and near certain. However, *who* fights "wars," as opposed to other, less legitimate or illegitimate forms of organized political violence, shows world history's contribution to understanding embedded normativity of primary institutions. Keal (2017) assesses Bull's account of war as systematic, organized political violence by *states*, understood in Weberian terms as claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Consequently, violence by those denied the status of statehood was not necessarily "war," and certainly not "in the strict sense" Bull described. "Civilizational" discourses, especially in nineteenth and early twentieth century European justifications of colonial and imperial expansion, established compliance with Western laws and standards on conducting war within the primary institution of the "standard of civilization" (e.g. Gong, 1984). Civilized states fought "wars." Barbarian or savage states, or non-states, fought something else (Buzan and Lawson, 2015: 97–125; Hobson, 2012: 31–58, 106–130; Keal, 2017).

The standard of civilization mandated forcible expropriation and displacement of populations failing to make fully productive use of land. What counted as fully productive was assessed against Western capitalist benchmarks. Violent resistance could not, by definition, be "war," because fought by uncivilized groups. Race played a central role, as "scientific" racism reinforced bases for identifying those who could, and those who would never, attain a civilizational level whereby their violence could be privileged as "war" (Keal, 2017; Klotz, 2017). War "in the strict sense" displays primary institutional characteristics as practices imbued with norms, beliefs and values constituting actors ("civilized" states) and establishing behavioral requirements linked to the overall goal of maintaining a racialized hierarchical international society. In this society "civilized" states gain entitlements to rule those deemed developmentally backward or incapable of development at all. That hierarchy remains, and not just in relation to war, but also in trade and international law (e.g. Anghie, 2000; Fidler, 2000). Global history establishes how defining war links to institutions of capitalism, race, and civilizational exceptionalism (Hobson, 2012; Keal, 2017; Rae, 2017).

Recent renewed interest in the Standard of Civilization as a primary institution entangled with war, trade, law, and sovereignty draws out how its ostensible abandonment in the mid-twentieth century hides a deep and enduring legacy (Aalberts, 2014; Anghie, 2000; Buzan, 2014b; Fidler, 2000; O'Hagan, 2020; Towns, 2014). The singular "anarchical society," characterized by the absence of overarching authority predicated on sovereign equality, in which states retain inherent and inalienable rights to self-defense, is consequently undermined. Hierarchical access to the right to wage war (in the strict sense) persists, linked to the ideas and ideals of the civilized as exemplified in the

idealized conduct of the West, and most especially of the US. As Hobson (2014) argues, hierarchy is the defining feature of international relations. That is not just an empirical claim, but one entrenched (if disguised) within IR theory, and the ES is no exception. The normativity of war as a global ordering practice creates permissive spaces for specific forms of violence legitimized in civilizational ways, pointing to space as a neglected element of ES theory, but one which is revealing of hierarchical and civilizational theorization of war as a primary institution. The one-world world of a singular international society defining spaces where civilized states fight wars (or trade, exercise legal authority, engage in diplomacy and other behaviors and practices legitimized by primary institutions) begins to look very different if those spaces are explored differently. A pluriversal international societ(y/ies) where differing epistemologies lead to reinterpretation of historical and contemporary experience becomes possible. Viewing war "in the strict sense" in this way means reconsidering war's spatiality.

The purposeful control and utilization of territory for waging war and denying to those targeted agential status as war-fighters and access to warfare's legitimizing language is not just a colonial-era phenomenon. A complex, hybridized admixture of COIN and CT (hereafter COIN/CT) is an important shift in war as an institution of international society in the first quarter of this century because it radically alters ideas of spatiality creating new forms of epistemological exclusion and ontological denial to reinforce patterns of domination through the notion of a singular international society.

COIN/CT presents forms of violence such as "jihadism" by unrecognized authorities defined as "militants," "insurgents," and "terrorists" as radically destabilizing international society. It therefore invokes one of war's standard legitimizing claims. However, whereas previous accounts of destabilizing and order-threatening challenges to be met by war originated with states intent on changing the nature of international society—Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany are classic instances—here the threat emerges from the existence of certain spaces in international society. How we conceptualize and theorize space therefore matters far more than is usually noted within ES work. However, the dominant spatial conceptualization marginalizes (at best) the perspectives and experiences of the vast majority of people inhabiting those spaces.

Specific accounts of territory frame COIN/CT. Twenty years of post-September 11th 2001 US-led military action invokes dangers created by failed, failing, and weak states resulting in ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed spaces where terrorists and insurgents can hide and establish bases (e.g. Lamb, 2008; Wyler, 2008). Every post-2001 US National Security Strategy makes this claim (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2002: 10–11, 2006: 7–9, 12, 15, 2010: 8, 19–20, 2015: 9, 10–11, 26, 2017: 10–11, 48). The relationship between such spaces and terrorism and insurgency predates 9/11. In the early 1990s the Clinton administration linked them to another trans-national threat subjected to a US-led "war"—drug cartels (Helman and Ratner, 1992; Heng, 2006; Kenney, 2008). Ungoverned spaces are consequently existential threats legitimizing war because terrorists, insurgents and others *will* congregate there. This spatial form prefigures illegitimate violence.

This highly dubious nexus manifests in COIN/CT (Boyle, 2010; Hehir, 2007; Page, 2016; Zenko and Wolf, 2015). Controlling territory to deny space for terrorists and insurgents is a near-unquestioned article of faith that establishes UAS as a key technology,

although what "control" means differs across the agglomeration's components. UAS are lauded for functions seemingly ideal for this form of war: long loiter; extensive surveillance capabilities; networked integration with other intelligence assets and military forces; and, for specific UAS, precision weapon delivery for targeted killing and close air support (e.g. Byman, 2013; Niva, 2013; Strawser, 2010). Academic and policy community advocates declare drones as "game-changing" technologies in general (e.g. Bowden, 2013; Gusterson, 2016; Whittle, 2014) and specifically for COIN and CT (e.g. Brennan, 2012; Byman, 2013; Hayden, 2016). Their primary institutional linkage includes presenting them as civilized, even morally obligatory, conduct in CT and COIN operations under certain circumstances (Strawser, 2010). Their supposed efficacy in reducing levels and intensity of terrorist and insurgent organizational capacity, activities, and attacks is the key metric for success, reflecting war's legitimation as order-bringing (e.g. Johnston, 2012; Johnston and Sarbahi, 2016; Price, 2012; Rigterink, 2021; Tominaga, 2018). Suppressing terrorist activity and limiting attacks is spatially specific. Doing so in areas central to the US, its key allies, and core interests is the doctrinal goal for CT (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014: I-5, V-1). Within COIN, the goal is to transition responsibility to host governments able to protect core US interests and allies (United States Department of the Army, 2006: 1–4, 1–113 – 111–157). However, once penetrated by COIN/CT, spatial integrity remains contingent, and access for strikes from "over the horizon" necessary (Kindervater, 2017: 212–213; Shaw and Akhter, 2012).

The space-controlling and space-creating characteristics of UAS are extensive (e.g. Agius, 2017; Kindervater, 2017; Williams, 2015a). Their role in COIN/CT means spaces where drones operate are contemporary analogs of colonialism's barbarous or savage spaces where war (although not "in the strict sense") is fought against enemies denied the status of war-fighters, and where rules of "civilized" conduct do not apply, or not in the same way, or to the same extent (e.g. Franck, 2004; Goldman and Tittemore, 2002; Kretzmer, 2005). Parallels with colonial-era uses of airpower, typically British imperial "policing" actions in 1920s Iraq, are noted (e.g. Neocleous, 2013; Satia, 2014). ES theory has not, yet, considered the exceptionality of this contemporary "civilized" space, as opposed to those of historical contexts. Where the "ghosts" of colonialism, have been identified in touchstone ES work, they are linked to development (Pasha, 2017), although it, too, is presented as a potential outcome of successful COIN/CT.

Substantial research sets out the distinctive forms of power, coercion, and violence UAS create, through both the technology itself and the distinctive "assemblage" of drones and the supporting web of military, civilian, and intelligence staff; communication networks; and legal framings (Birdsall, 2018; Doucet, 2016; Gregory, 2011b; Hurd, 2017; Schmidt and Trenta, 2018; Williams, 2011). This plugs drones into deep-rooted social dynamics of technology wherein war is rational, even civilizing. COIN/CT doctrinal goals and anticipated outcomes embed claims to Western exceptionalism in defining space and then exercising control over it. ES theory must address its theoretical shortcomings in relation to how primary institutions construct political spaces and embed normative character into those spaces.

At present, however, analyzing COIN/CT's failures to achieve institutionally legitimated goals of increasing international order focus on empirical claims of policy failure and agent culpability, not theoretical reconsideration. For example, civilian deaths caused

by COIN/CT drone strikes is a major issue (e.g. Cavallaro et al., 2012; Emmerson, 2014: 21–74; Gregory, 2017). Civilian populations' experiences of "Living Under Drones" are presented in terms of breaching international humanitarian and human rights law (Cavallaro et al., 2012). Furthermore, discussion of drone crews' experience stress dehumanizing effects of drone crews' language describing civilians (e.g. Gregory, 2018; Wilcox, 2017). Such criticism focuses on the pathologies of COIN/CT's dehumanization of those targeted, contrasting COIN/CT claims to protect and promote local populations' human rights. The next step of discovering how war looks from the other end of drones' "scopic regimes" (Grayson and Mawdsley, 2019) asks distinctive questions about war's institutionalization via deep rooted social-structural changes as seen by the marginalized. It recognizes the diversity of those perspectives and eschews the claims to exceptionality. Here, the opportunity for decolonial methods looms large in creating pluriversal perspective revealing how war is not just about order within a singular international society. It creates spaces, allocates resources, suppresses perspectives, and legitimizes death in ways only perceptible through different methodologies, diverse epistemologies, and an open-mindedness to multiple ontologies. This is not to replace standard ES accounts of war as a primary institution, or to insist on the superiority of pluriversal alternatives. To do so would be to fall into a different version of the same one-world world trap of a singular spatiality current ES accounts display.

Worlding war

For Inoue (2018: 27), worlding means, "making the world intelligible and determining the 'we' in relation to 'others' as well as the extent to which such processes of sense making constitute the worlds we live in." Conceptualities such as failed states as permissive sites for COIN/CT against populations constructed as suspicious, if not hostile, obliterates those populations as participants in worlding because they are not "others" with agency in sense-making and unable to form relations with "we." They are "implausible, ideological or spurious . . . and consigned to the realm of . . . nonsense" (Blaney and Tickner quoted in Inoue 2018: 27).

COIN/CT emphasizes cost-benefit/utility-payoff perspectives, exemplified in quantitative studies of decapitation strategies cited above. Worlding sees power in multiple accounts of political action accessible via distinct cosmologies of the relationship between human beings and their place in the world. International society characterized by a "pluriverse" is one outcome of these moves. Imposing a singular, *uni*versal view restricts assessments of action, intention, and outcomes by excluding categories inapplicable or incomprehensible without alternative epistemologies and cosmologies (e.g. Hutchings, 2019). COIN/CT and UAS as its exemplary technology do exactly this at present. Two principal components create a "worlding" analysis of COIN/CT and key spatial and technological forms: challenging the epistemology of COIN/CT spatiality, and ontologies of agency as relational. Together, these show this bridgehead of war as primary institution supports a more ambitious ES theoretical agenda.

Spatiality. Gregory (2018) and Wilcox (2017) explain the dehumanization of inhabitants of zones subject to COIN/CT. The "ungoverned safe havens" claim imposes a spatiality

that ignores both the how and why of becoming "ungoverned," specifically the role of colonial and imperial legacies, and impacts of COIN/CT on informal and traditional, but often highly effective and long-standing, governance forms (Page and Williams, 2021). Whether bringing barbarous or savage land into civilized productive use through imperialism, or bringing "government" to ungoverned spaces, the land's inhabitants' perspectives, practices, and knowledge are excluded as Western epistemologies are imposed. "What they do" (Gregory, 2018: 347) only possesses meaning COIN/CT grants, because that is the valid knowledge of war as an institution of international society.

Even conscious efforts to maximize analytical potential in relation to war by minimizing assumptions spatialize war in a specific way. Bousquet et al. (2020: 104) argue, "The more assured we are that we know what war is, that we know in advance what to measure . . . the more it will slip between our fingers." Aiming to understand war via "martial empiricism" based on the "barest tentative intuitions" (Bousquet et al., 2020: 101) makes Western-centric assumptions in revealing whatever nature war may possess. "[W]ar understood at its paroxysm as the fulminant meeting of hostile forces" (Bousquet et al., 2020: 109) implies a spatial battlefield assumption recalling Clausewitzian ideas of war as a clash of wills and suggests an equality of forces the standard of civilization and war "in the strict" sense denies.

Decolonial work is rich in spatial imagery in its efforts to overturn Western knowledge forms creating an epistemological universe. Mignolo's (2009: 160) critique notes how colonized knowledge assumes that, "From a detached and neutral point of observation . . . the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them." Santos' (2017: 118–122) "abyssal line" uses cartographic imagery and analogy, arguing that epistemic exclusion originates with colonial mapping and making of the world. The lines denominate Western modernity's "regulation/emancipation" dynamic and consequent inclusion in the world, from locations where an "appropriation/violence" model excludes them from the world. These lines have become less cartographic over time, although they can still be mapped in many instances, but no less authoritative in their narration of space (Santos, 2017: 108–109, 124–133).

Santos shows knowledge and knowledge forms as excised and rendered the object, not of engagement, but of study and consequent rationalization. "On the other side of the line, there is no real knowledge: there are beliefs, opinions, intuitions, and subjective understandings, which, at the most, may become objects or raw materials for scientific enquiry" (Santos, 2017: 120). He continues:

> [A]byssal cartography is constitutive of modern knowledge. [Beyond the line] is . . . the realm of incomprehensible beliefs and behaviors that in no way can be considered knowledge, whether true or false. The other side of the line harbors only incomprehensible magical or idolatrous practices. The utter strangeness of such practices [leads] to denying the very human nature of the agents of such practices. . . . The other side of the abyssal line is . . . beyond truth and falsehood' (Santos, 2017, 122-123).

This adds epistemological depth to the ES concept of a standard of civilization entangled with the permissibility, even necessity, of war against those deemed barbarous or savage,

whether through formalized stratifications of imperial law and practice, or through a spatial order characterized by ungoverned safe havens. People incapable of creating valid knowledge are, ". . . not conceivably candidates for social inclusion. . . . The negation of one part of humanity is sacrificial in that it is the condition of the affirmation of that other part of humanity that considers itself universal" (Santos, 2017: 123–124). For example, UK Prime Minister David Cameron implicitly claimed for the UK universal values whilst arguing for UK military intervention in Syria in 2015. He described Daesh as an "evil death cult" that "enslaves Yazidis, throws gay people off buildings, beheads aid workers, and forces children to marry before they are even 10 years old" (Cameron, 2015: Columns 328, 338). Cameron, of course, offered no reflection on near-identical British imperial policies and practices (e.g. Sangheera, 2021: 142–145, 162, 198, 203–205), or noted the UK's direct contributions to and responsibility for the geopolitical crisis in the Middle East that made Daesh a possibility. In August 2021, as Kabul fell to the Taliban, and the UK, alongside other Western states, scrambled to evacuate personnel, Prime Minister Johnson (2021: col. 1253, 1254) declared:

> [T]he United Kingdom . . . joined America in going into Afghanistan . . . to do whatever we could to stabilise Afghanistan, in spite of all the difficulties and challenges we knew that we would face. And we succeeded in that core mission. . . .
>
> We worked for a better future for the people of Afghanistan. The heroism and tireless work of our armed forces contributed to national elections as well as to the promotion and protection of human rights and equalities in a way that many in Afghanistan had not previously known. Whereas 20 years ago, almost no girls went to school and women were banned from positions of governance, now 3.6 million girls have been in school this year alone and women hold over a quarter of the seats in the Afghan Parliament.

This is the UK as civilizing savior, whose selfless efforts to do nothing more than aid benighted Afghans had been ungratefully spurned through no fault of their own. Had Johnson recited Kipling's (1899) famous lines, it would hardly have seemed out of place:[1]

> Take up the White Man's burden—
> Send forth the best ye breed—
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need;
> To wait in heavy harness
> On fluttered folk and wild—
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
> Half devil and half child.

Walsh's (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 101) decolonial praxis locates potential in "the borders, margins, and cracks of the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatricachal order." Walsh uses spatial concepts in agricultural imagery of sowing and planting, invoking non- or pre-capitalist relationships to differently bordered land, to describe alternative epistemology. Indigenous knowledge of the land are a decolonial resource (Mignolo and

Walsh, 2018: 35), reinforcing how controlling territorializing dimensions of discourse are critical to constructing space. This demands a different form of world history that connects epistemology and spatiality to challenge modernist social science and interpretive methodologies of contemporary ES theory by disputing the ostensible impartiality and universality of modernist enquiry and demands interpretivism takes seriously the knowledge and experience of those beyond the abyssal line on terms they set. "Worlding" war calls for ES enquiry to further extend its world historical account beyond the elite level, and to ask far-reaching questions about its epistemological assumptions and research techniques. This recognizes how normative ideas about the primary institutions of war and the standard of civilization are not separate from the methodologies we use to explore those primary institutions. Appealing to the empirical data as normatively neutral and making choices about data that fit with the ontology of a "one-world world" paradoxically de-historicizes and re-colonizes theorization of international society and its primary institutions.

Santos outlines what a broadened methodological agenda looks like via concepts of "ecologies of knowledge" and "intercultural translation," making clear this is both necessarily normative and, consequently, non-relativist (Santos, 2017: 188–235): "Knowledge is not representation; it is intervention" (Santos, 2017: 207). Consequently, institutions of international society, such as war, cannot be described neutrally or impartially. The knowledge forms of description and analysis benefit from "worlding" by having their epistemological bases brought into creative, non-hierarchical contact with alternatives drawing from experiences of inhabitants of territory over which war rages. A decolonial move is not about replacing one perspective with another, but about equal and open-minded engagement granting weight and value to people and perspectives excised by Western epistemologies. Santos' notion of "rearguard" intellectuals, who follow behind the activism and engagement of marginalized and subaltern peoples to record, systematize, and disseminate emergent concepts, ideas, and theories is a neat contrast to the vanguardism of much social and political theory (Santos, 2017: 11, 13, 17, 231).

Theorizing international society is theorizing international societ(y/ies), because primary institutions take on different forms and perform different functions that different methodologies reveal. Spatialization helps capture this ontological plurality. A decolonial approach should not replace current ES accounts of war summarized above with one that sees war, and COIN/CT in particular, as a racialized, exclusionary, neo-colonial practice deploying specific epistemological standards to deny agency and status to non-western and non-white peoples. War is both these things—and many other things, too. "Worlding" war shows sense-making creates different "us" and "them" relating differently in pluriversal ways. ES theory's historical interest, and its methodological open-mindedness are extendable to encompass worlding, in a way that is uncommon amongst IR theories that retain ambitions to present a "big picture" account.[2]

Recovering distinctive ontologies. Theoretically and methodologically richer analysis using decolonial methods offers wider understandings of war's ontological character as a primary institution. Specifically, relationality drawing on non-Western accounts of the importance of individual and group relationships to land and territory provides channels for exploring agency (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 15–102). "[W]orldliness inheres in the

irreducible relations between diverse beings, which cannot be derived simply by aggregating discrete beings or their interests" (Mitchell, 2014: 11). "Worlding" emphasizes ontologies of relationality between affected populations and the technologies and practices of war to change our understanding of primary institutions via what it means to share institutions across members, and how membership is constituted and regulated.

Relations as constitutive of a field of study, rather than the "objects" that do the relating, is prominent in decolonial work (e.g. Hobson and Sajed, 2017; Inoue, 2018; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Tucker, 2018; Zalewski, 2019). This ontological move emphasizes that what exists between the participants is what matters most (Jackson and Nexon, 2019). Relationships constitute actors and relations endow actors with meaning and positionality in the world. That makes understanding COIN/CT's epistemological violence central to interpreting war as an institution of international society because COIN/CT's logics necessitate constructing relationships with others on the basis of their being spatially subject to violence and possessing value within a cost/benefit epistemology. Considering how those "others" relationally locate themselves to their world brings both a critical edge to ES theory and an opportunity for normative analysis that would challenge COIN/CT as the manifestation of institutionalized war in international society.

Using a conventional ontological and epistemological framework, Page and Williams' (2021) historically and culturally contextualized analysis of drone use in Afghanistan throws light on Afghans' perceptions of UAS. Insights from local populations provide both distinctive analysis that challenges established accounts of what drones mean to people living where they operate, and effective methodological critique of principal forms of UAS analysis. Taking seriously local historical-cultural circumstances can grant equal standing to perspectives marginalized, or worse, in most COIN/CT analysis. Anthropologically careful empirical research highlighting marginalized groups' knowledge and understanding of drone use offers an example of empirical research exploring spatial and epistemological responses that consciously minimizes recasting that knowledge within an imposed epistemological framework to render it comprehensible and "valid." As Tucker (2018) notes, this is slow and challenging work. It can be at odds with established ideas about valid knowledge forms in academic analysis but reveals pluriversal accounts drawing out relational ontologies disguised by deeply embedded subject-object dualism.

The inescapability of territory and territorialization, whether empirical or metaphorical, means worlding war takes seriously how land, place, space, territory (and other descriptions of physical locations on the planet) are embedded in the relationality of people within their physical locations. Relationality searches for what Inoue (2018: 32) describes as "resonances" between accounts from different peoples reflecting their very different, multiversal, accounts of phenomena such as COIN/CT. That challenges the juggernaut normativity of COIN/CT's cost/benefit analysis through necessary engagement with affected populations, drawing on methods such as Creative Listening and Speaking and engaged pedagogies (Inoue, 2018; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018: 15–98; Santos, 2018: 209–292). ES emphasis on the "more evolved than designed" nature of primary institutions needs to search for those resonances via research methods that move beyond elites, showing primary institutions' constitutive and regulatory functions in pluriversal perspectives, revealing how marginalized people are constituted as irrelevant, and violently regulated to sustain patterns of hierarchical order.

That does not invalidate current modernist social scientific and interpretive methodologies. They remain important to accessing one dimension of a pluriverse. However, it does mean focusing on elites as possessing privileged insights needs to be set aside, deprioritizing those "professionally or intimately involved" in state decision-making (Wilson, 2012: 518), or amongst "the 20,000 people worldwide who are the primary subjects of international ethics," and of whom only about 1000 really matter (Jackson, 2000: 134). Current interpretive work via practice theory (e.g. Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014; Bukovansky et al., 2012) offers further examples of how a relational ontology can be empirically investigated but point in one direction only—upwards and inwards toward international society's established power centers. Whilst arguments for a primary institution of "resistance" drawing on subaltern historiography point downwards and outwards (Williams, 2015b), ES empiricism needs techniques like intercultural translation and ecologies of knowledge to access relational ontologies. One, albeit elite-oriented, example is Qin's (2018) work on Confucian-based analysis of international society using a distinctive dialectical form to reveal how each participant is within the other such that the radical exclusion of the abyssal line cannot be sustained without denying oneself, as we are the other. Consequently, acknowledgment of and engagement with all others within international society is unavoidable. "Worlding" reveals both different social structural dynamics indebted to epistemes that re-describe primary institutions and offer different theories of the histories of their creation and evolution.

ES scholarship on the institution of war can acknowledge limitations in current engagement with dominant institutional forms and look to alternatives from marginalized history to understand the present as pluriversal. Engaging that knowledge is far from easy, but just as ES theory has responded to the Global IR call for world historical perspective, it needs a "worlding" epistemology to incorporate knowledge forms from very different places to elite perspectives that dominate ES theory to date. That can access a pluriversal and relational ontology more fully revealing of the many forms sharing, constituting, and regulating through primary institutions takes. ES theory's existing historical sophistication can accommodate this broadening.

Conclusion

ES theory's increasingly sophisticated account of deep-rooted change in the long-run historical construction of international society, and interpretivist insights into the specific development of ideas, practices, policies, and behaviors can gain further. "Worlding" war as a primary institution of international society moves the ES research agenda around war in three important directions. These likely apply to other primary institutions.

Firstly, looking at ES engagement with Global IR shows strengths in using world history to develop ES work on primary institutions. That reinforces institutional analysis to make sense of international society's development and operation. ES writers already acknowledge violence, oppression, racism, and subjugation accompanying international society's expansion through engaging Global IR's appeal to world history (e.g. see contributions in Dunne and Reus-Smit, 2017b). Yet, ES methodology remains comparatively poorly suited to doing more than offering a better narrative of a more diverse world history, and an account of the intellectual influences, including racial and colonial

thinking, on the school. Whether modernist social science, or interpretive, ES theory's research agenda and intellectual perspective remains epistemologically and methodologically *uni*versal.

Section two shows war, manifesting in COIN/CT, remains a central primary institution in international society, reflecting colonial epistemological legacies emphasizing the politics of space and spatialization. The entanglement of COIN/CT with re-territorialized space highlighted by critical geopolitical work augments ES theory's framework for exploring how innovations in war inform and are informed by other primary institutions, such as sovereignty, territoriality, rights, and markets. However, if it does so only from this side of the "abyssal line," seeing social structural processes shaping institutions, and interpreting the actions of those shaping those processes, from specific perspectives. It is missing insights from a pluriversal world.

Section three showed how worlding war opens the door to those exposed to COIN/CT but written out of it. War should be understood with those whose knowledge of it is deep, intimate, lived, and enduring because they inhabit the spaces of COIN/CT, but whose knowledge is obliterated, alongside their agency, and, in too many cases, their physical existence. It is not only "collateral damage" they suffer, but the impossibility of being recognized as meaningfully existing within COIN/CT. Drawing on spatiality and pointing to ontological innovations, epistemological advances coming from decolonial theory can help ES theory.

ES theory is properly acknowledged as an important contributor to Global IR's agenda. Understanding how the society of states, its signature conceptual contribution, was formed, functions, and changes, is greatly enhanced by that agenda. Yet retaining a *uni*versal ontology of international society restricts its account of formation, function, and change. Epistemological privileging, including through methodological choices, constrains the potential to analyze international societ(y/ies). A pluriversal ES can and should engage decolonial methods to unlock greater historical and historiographical insights into international society, expanding the reach and power of its account of colonialism, and of embedded normativity in international society as a mechanism for generating order through primary institutions as constitutive and regulatory of specific actors sharing common goals and collective identity. The costs of that society's creation, functioning, and future will be more fully revealed and more thoroughly understood by "worlding" primary institutions such as war.

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Notes

1. Johnson did recite Kipling's "The Road to Mandalay," a colonial era poem steeped in racist tropes, whilst Foreign Secretary and visiting the Shwedagon Pagoda, the most sacred Buddhist site in Yangon. The British Ambassador stopped him, noting the poem's inappropriateness. See Boris Johnson caught on camera reciting Kipling in Myanmar temple | Boris Johnson | The Guardian
2. I am grateful to Barry Buzan for this term. He elaborates on it further in a forthcoming book: "The Making of Global Society: from before the dawn of history to the near future."

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