

The Importance of Racial Inclusion in Security Studies

Written by T.V. Paul and Amitav Acharya

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T.V. PAUL AND AMITAV ACHARYA, JUL 6 2022

As two past presidents of ISA who originally came from the Global South, and who maintain substantial teaching and research links there,[1] we have witnessed the association's progress in inclusivity. The intellectual perspective on 'Global IR' that Acharya has promoted, is increasingly accepted as an approach of significance as evident in scholarship and course inclusions. It was during Paul's presidency that the Global South Task Force was established. It came out with a number of recommendations which were adopted by the Governing Council at its meeting in San Francisco in March 2018 and its report contains many ideas for racial inclusivity.[2] The recommendations on conference attendance, travel grants, participation in ISA governing bodies, journal submissions/acceptance rates, and training programs by ISA/affiliated sections/caucuses for scholars from the global south were aimed at making ISA more globally-oriented.

ISA implemented some of these proposals. Among them, the Committee on the Status of Engagement with the Global South and the holding of regular regional conferences in global south venues were two concrete achievements. There is also greater discussion within ISA on the need for inclusivity as evident in the efforts by the International Security Studies (ISS) Section. The next step should be a similar effort to improve the status of Blacks and indigenous scholars who are not yet playing a significant role in the discipline. A presidential task force is urgently needed in this area.

Yet, we also recognize the task is much wider than we have envisioned. In fact, among all the IR sub-fields, security studies is one area where inclusivity is much less present. This is visible in many dimensions – recruitment of faculty, topics of research, journal review and editorial selection processes, especially in the number of articles by racial minorities submitted, reviewed and published, and citations received. Gatekeeping is inherently a challenge in all these areas as exclusivity is maintained through the working of formal and informal networks.[3] As far as we know no proper statistics exist on this subject. However, as a recent Council on Foreign Relations Report cogently argued:

High-potential candidates of diverse backgrounds are often overlooked and undervalued in recruitment efforts for faculty and leadership positions. Their research may be underappreciated, particularly if it focuses on related dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion within international affairs. They may have attended schools that are less familiar to selection panels, leading candidates to face school-related biases. At times, they are not aware of job announcements because they have different professional networks and alternate sources of information.[4]

Security Studies as a pivotal branch of International Relations is the largest section of ISA. So, what is the challenge here? Paul also served as ISS section chair from 2009-11 and it was under his leadership that the proposal for the *Journal of Global Security Studies* was prepared and submitted to ISA Governing Council. During his term the section grew in size and also was able to cosponsor H-Diplo-ISS Forum, an initiative of Professor Robert Jervis. Both these venues have done well although more global south representation is desirable in both. The core problem is one of supply and demand which are affected by "implicit" or "unconscious" biases that exist among IR scholars. There is general awareness in the larger media, university and corporation spaces today, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, on the need for addressing the implicit bias problem.[5] Yet our discipline is yet to confront this head on.

Take the case of faculty recruitments. Unless the committees that make the decisions are well-prepared in warding

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off this problem, there is always a temptation to bring in scholars from one's own often ethnically-oriented friendly networks. A cycle is perpetuated and it is impossible for most scholars of racial minorities to have the relationships to get a fair attention of hiring committees. We notice this problem is acute in some of the leading schools as we believe they do not give diversity its due role. A quick look at the faculty profiles in prominent IR programs will attest to this point. There is also an implicit bias in favour of ideological perspectives whereby the effort is to bring more of one's own kind rather than diverse group of scholars.

In North America in recent years, many universities and corporations have been taking racial inclusivity seriously by appointing special counsellors and task forces. In fact, leading multinational companies such as Google and Microsoft have realized the value of diversity and academia is needed diversity for teaching students who come from diverse backgrounds.[6] Silicon Valley would not have been this successful without a workforce originating from different parts of the world although we recognize proper diversity is still a challenge there as well.

IR journals, including ISA's own have a long way to go in promoting inclusivity. What is needed is education on the problem of implicit biases for all those who run ISA journals. We need more systematic efforts to train editorial teams and reviewers on how to avoid implicit biases and promote quality scholarship of all racial groups.

Some journals like *International Affairs* (Chatham House) now have made a requirement on special issue editors to make sure women and minorities are adequately represented. This has not made the journal any inferior and actually it is now 4th in the worldwide ranking of IR journals. All ISA and non-ISA journals such as *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Security Studies*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *World Politics* badly need to have the same policies. When editorial committees change, they need to be aware of the need for editors and advisory committees with diverse backgrounds and train them all how to promote inclusivity. We are not talking of affirmative action for the sake of it.

As noted, Security studies field is affected by the exclusion problem, perhaps more so than other fields like International Development or even Comparative Politics. It is not just Western-centric, but also uniquely American-centric. This may be foundational; the concept of "national security" which emerged in the US after World War II, became the dominant organizing framework for Security Studies which precluded scholars from the Global South a meaningful place in it. Revealingly, the alternative idea of Human Security, or security for the people, which was pioneered by two economists hailing from the Global South, Mahbub ul-Haq and Amartya Sen, has attracted little following in the US, and hence in the ISS section, despite its growing popularity in the Global South as well as in parts of Europe.

ISA could be that place and the ISS section needs to broaden its interest in diverse security issues. The "unconscious" or "implicit bias" problem needs to be addressed and ideas and proposals to ameliorate it should be brought to scholars' attention. More propagation of the need for inclusion should be made. It is generally accepted that individuals tend to make automatic stereotype assumptions (often without realizing it) based on one's cultural experiences and understanding developed through socialization over the years. Persons not belonging to majority communities may not be treated equally in decisions by committees of recruitment or publications. Their works need not receive the attention or get cited due to these biases. ISA and its sections should make clear that panels should include Global South scholars. Journals should have inclusive editorial committees and practices to have Global South and blacks and other minorities have adequate representation. ISSS awards and leadership positions should represent ISA's diversity rather than a small coterie of scholars from leading Northern institutions almost regularly getting them. Under-represented racialized minority or Global South scholars have never been selected for the ISSS annual Distinguished Scholar Award, even though one could think of many deserving candidates. Editorial boards and award committees should have adequate minority representation. The effort of ISA and its sections, security studies in particular, should be to make measurable results in the area racial inclusivity.

There is also a need to challenge and transform questionable academic practices that marginalize Global South perspectives. Many Western scholars routinely ignore writings on security (or IR more generally) by Global South scholars by failing to cite them in their work, even though in some cases their scholarship is academically rigorous (although not necessarily in a narrow positivist manner) and have preceded and anticipated major changes in world

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politics. For example, Mohamed Ayoob had analysed issues such as internal conflicts and failed states well before the end of the Cold War and made these parts of the mainstream agenda of Security Studies.

The crisis of the Western dominated international order, which traditional security studies was founded upon, was analysed by scholars from the non-Western world including in postcolonial critiques. The US scholars who woke up to the decline of the Liberal International Order with Trump's victory in 2016 have turned it into an all-American debate over US foreign policy, ignoring the prior and critical perspectives from the global south on the topic. Just as journals and books are now conscious of the legitimate need to cite the work of women scholars, so should they be accountable for citing the relevant work of Global South scholars, which are becoming increasingly available through the internet.

Notes

[1] Acharya lived and taught in Singapore for 12 years after his PhD, and has regularly taught in South Africa, Myanmar, China (including a year in 2016–17), and Thailand. Paul regularly lectures in academic institutions in India and many other global south countries.

[2] For the Global South Task Force Report and recommendations, see https://www.isanet.org/Portals/0/Documents/GlobalSouth/2018_GlobalSouthTaskForce.pdf.

[3] The criteria for global south scholars we consider are those historically unrepresented or underrepresented racialized minority scholars originating from or living in the global south.

[4] See Council on Foreign Relations, "Transforming International Affairs Education to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," March 8, 2021.

[5] For a good guide on the issue prepared by Canadian Social Science and Research Council, see, <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx>. For the deeper roots of such biases, a must read is: Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).

[6] For their strategies, see the Google Annual Diversity Report 2020.

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