

Special Section

Introduction

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The resurgence of religiously inspired political violence in the post-Cold War world has re-awoken interest in the study of political violence, particularly after the tragic events of September 11, 2011 (hereafter 9/11). Whereas much of the debate has focused on the propensity of certain cultural groupings or “civilizations” (Huntington, 1993) to use violence in pursuit of political ends, the ontology of violence itself has remained unexamined since Johan Galtung introduced his now seminal typology of violence. Distinguishing between direct/personal and structural violence, Galtung defined violence as the ‘*difference between the potential and the actual*, between what is and what could be’ (Galtung, 1969, 168-italics in the original). Thus, for Galtung, if a person dies from tuberculosis today, violence is present because it is now a preventable disease which was not the case in the eighteenth century. By extension the fact that people throughout the world continue to die of preventable diseases such as malaria and polio (or continue to starve in a world capable of feeding everyone on the planet) may be considered an act of violence whereas Ebola, a disease currently ravaging West Africa for which no cure has hitherto been found, cannot. Many critics, however, have claimed that Galtung’s understanding of violence is too broad. Just about everything, for Galtung, can be considered a form of violence if it prevents the realization of the individual’s potential. Thus, socio-economic or gender-based inequalities arising from unequal structures of power are considered as egregious as state-sponsored genocides. By expanding the concept of violence to include structural violence, Galtung, it is claimed, absolves agents who have intentionally

committed violent acts of responsibility for their actions. The lines, therefore, between perpetrator and victim become blurred.

This special section, arising out a series of international workshops organized by the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) with financial assistance provided by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and the Japan ICU Foundation (JICUF), examines contemporary forms of political violence in international relations. The first article by Professor Andrew Linklater (Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK), based on a keynote presentation delivered at ICU on February 22nd 2014, seeks to account for the development of social standards of self-restraint in world politics. Applying insights from the process sociologist Norbert Elias's work on the European "civilizing process"-the process by which Europeans came to believe that they were more civilized than their ancestors and other peoples- to international relations, Linklater examines whether the contemporary era is distinctive if not unique in its concern with the problem caused by violent harm. Prof. Linklater's contribution is part of a much larger work which seeks to analyze the need to control violent harm in international relations (Linklater, 2011) and is a revised version of a chapter which will appear in his forthcoming book on *Violence and Civilization in the Western States-System* (Linklater, forthcoming). We are privileged to be able to publish his article in this special issue.

This next contribution by Giorgio Shani based on his recently published book *Religion, Identity and Human Security* (2014), seeks to critically interrogate the view that the emergence of "human security" can be seen as a manifestation of what Norbert Elias aptly termed the "civilizing process". It argues that, although Human Security may be seen as the latest installment of the "civilizing mission" facilitating Western intervention in colonized societies, it has the potential to constitute a powerful global ethic by distancing itself from its western secular origins and recognizing the multiple religio-cultural contexts in which human dignity is embedded. The shortcoming of conventional understandings of human security, which was first introduced to the international community through the United Nations Human Development Report over two decades ago (UNDP, 1994), are ex-

amined in greater detail by Magdalena Ionescu who argues that human security has lost its “transformative ethos” and has become a tool of hegemonic forces seeking to incorporate challengers and their tools into the structures that justify and facilitate their domination.

Finally, Professor Ohgushi (University of Tokyo) in a presentation delivered on January 18, 2014 takes issue with the writings of critics of transitional justice. In an insightful critique, Ohgushi highlights the flaws in the arguments of those he considers to be “hypercritical” of transitional justice mechanisms designed to deal with the legacies of massive human rights abuses. Ohgushi finds the line of argument taken by “hypercritical” scholars to be logically unsound and morally objectionable in that they unintentionally exonerate perpetrators of physical and direct violence on a mass scale of responsibility for their actions. He concludes by underscoring the need for explicitly highlighting the “wrongness” of the abuses committed, a perspective lacking in “hypercritical approaches”. We would like to thank Professor Ohgushi for contributing to the special section and for his sponsorship of the workshop by providing financial assistance through his Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Joint Research Project [Category A] grant *Political Research into Globalization and Violence*.

References

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