

‘What is an Author?’: Critical Reflections on Authors and Authority in Critical Security Studies – Introduction.

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This special issue starts from some simple questions, questions that have are periodically raised throughout the arts, humanities and social sciences, including in Critical Security Studies (CSS) and critical International Relations (IR). Yet they are important enough to be repeatedly re-posed at key moments. What is an author? What role does the ‘author’ figure perform in contemporary CSS? How do claims made alongside or against an author undergird or undercut the authority of research, arguments, claims and statements in the field? What does it do to a field that sought to challenge, disrupt and overturn authority claims when its own reliance on foundational authors and their gendered, racialized assumptions is called into question?

Michel Foucault famously claimed that in Western culture, the author serves as an ‘ideological figure’ insofar as it is via reference to ‘the author’ that the proliferation of meanings inherent to an author’s work, inherent to language, stops (1984: 118-119). The cultural function of the author is to provide coherence, to individualize and to neutralize contradictions and slippages within and between texts. This is evident, for example, when we debate what is most representative of an author’s work and what is not, or what ‘turns’ an author’s work may have taken, such as a ‘political’, ‘aesthetic’ or ‘ethical turn’. It is also evident in what is presupposed in our citational practices when we invoke an author’s ‘authority’ and, in turn, signify our own and/or others belonging to a particular intellectual community or ‘school’. While such insights speak to the importance of questioning authors and authority, they also point to the acute problems that can arise when, as a result of this work, one or more of the canonical figures of an intellectual community is reread against the grain of contemporary sensibilities, if not the ethical commitments of that community. This has been well-evidenced by contemporary controversies in CSS – including those resulting from accusations of sexual misconduct against Foucault and those of racism against the Copenhagen School, the latter of which have been interpreted by some as an assault on the authors and intellectual authority of that School. Both controversies have reinvigorated debates about whose voices have been privileged and whose have been marginalized not only in CSS, but in production of knowledge more generally – in short, in the authorship of our world.

Foucault, of course, variously resisted the imposition of these and other ordering practices – tirelessly illustrating the imbrication of truth claims and knowledge with power, whilst provoking controversy with his conduct and ideas. This is beautifully illustrated by Erzsebet Strausz’s contribution to this special issue, as it explores the inconsistency and slipperiness of Foucault as author. And perhaps this resistance to ordering practices also provides Foucault’s most vital contribution to CSS. Alongside post-structuralist, critical constructivist and feminist thinkers, Foucault’s work helped to lay the groundwork for a broader dissident movement in IR and Security Studies – one less beholden to established theoretical traditions and the so-called ‘grand’ narratives of security and emancipation. With the emergence of CSS, the questions of “Security for whom?” and “Emancipation for whom?” came to the fore.¹ The unquestioned authority of past certainties and canonical figures waned. To the extent war was understood as a continuation of politics by other means, Foucault - alongside less cited others, including the Black Panther Party (BPP) – illuminated the various ways in which “everyday politics” could also be meaningfully understood as a continuation of war (Foucault, 2003: 15-16). ‘The political’ was herein revitalized – understood as at the heart of our knowledge claims

¹ See, for example, Ashley and Walker (1990), Dalby (1997) and Mutimer (2007)

– and, with this came a promise: that new meanings and possibilities could be realized, that the world as we knew it could be rewritten. This time subjugated knowledges were to be foregrounded.

And yet... Despite the rise of CSS and critical IR, much has remained the same, including many characteristics and functions of the author, as well as the authority to which they lay claim. Notably, for example, it is Foucault and not the BPP to whom we pay our intellectual debts, despite the myriad ways in which the writings, philosophies and struggles of the BPP “silently, yet profoundly” informed several of Foucault’s key insights including his reading of politics as war (Heiner, 2007: 315). In a sense, this is unsurprising. The words ‘author’ and ‘authority’ share an etymological root in the Latin *augere*, meaning to increase something, to originate or promote, and linking to *auctor*, as the originator or promoter. But crucially, *auctor* as instigator was also understood as father, master, progenitor. Author and authority were masculine, both *in* and *as* origin. Arriving into English via the Old French *autor*, *auctorite* and *autorite*, ‘author’ comes to be someone who invents or causes something. Meanwhile, ‘authority’ picks up a different link to power in Middle English, that of good reputation, of convincing others and inspiring trust. It continues the link to the written form, with *autorite* appearing to stem from a book or quotation with the power to settle an argument. At the root of ‘author’ and ‘authority’ lies the white, European man as master (see Bennett, 2004). It is no surprise, then, that each of the contributions to this special issue mention the importance of race and gender in critically addressing the role of authors and authority in CSS. But it remains a cause of concern that all the author-contributors to this special issue are white and European; the majority are also male. We will return to this issue below.

So how do things look today, 33 years after Richard K. Ashley and R.B.J. Walker (1990) inspired a generation of scholars, calling on IR to speak ‘the language of exile’ through ‘dissident thought’? It was with this question and recent controversies in mind that, via the call for papers for this special issue, we invited members of the CSS community to critically reflect on the role of authors and authority in CSS today. We called on those working in the field to reflect on the truth claims, ontologies, centers of authority and canonical figures that have been (re)produced in the wake of the creative upheaval inspired in part by the work of Foucault and others of his generation, as well as those whose voices have since been excluded or marginalized in canonical renderings of the discipline, as per van Munster and Sylvest’s contribution.

The timing of this special issue and its’ return to questions of the author/authority is in no small part related to the aforementioned accusations against Foucault,² but without a view to ascertaining their veracity or falsehood. Our interest, rather, is in the context wherein, whether true or false, these allegations speak to broader concerns about Orientalism and sexism in the work and life of Foucault specifically (Scullion, 1995; Afary and Anderson, 2005; Macey, 2004: 64, 103-109; Almond, 2007; Hekman, 1996), the work he has inspired in CSS (Howell and Richter-Monpetit, 2019) and, more generally, the failure of critical IR to de-center structures of white, male authority (Vitalis, 2015; Särämä, 2016). With recent calls to decolonize our institutions, to pluralize the loci of authority and to rethink power/knowledge still further, (e.g. Abboud et al., 2018; Adamson, 2020; Calderon, 2021; Dixit, 2014), it can reasonably be concluded that dissidence within IR and CSS is once again on the move. Indeed, the contributions by Tina Managhan as well as Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest highlight just how far CSS has to go in this regard. Those by Michael Murphy, Erszebet Strausz and Cian O’Driscoll, meanwhile, bring new insights to key epistemological issues – urging us to critically reflect on our understandings and practices of knowledge production and dissemination in CSS. All of these interventions work to further unsettle understandings of authors and authority in CSS, albeit in ways which we believe are fundamental to the CSS

² For more on this, see Sormon (2021), Guesmi (2021), Campbell (2021), and Kelly (2021).

project.

Critical Interventions – Entanglement and Experience

Certainly, the five interventions included in this Special Issue, as noted above, take a wide and diverse range of approaches to the questions posed by us editors. Calling on an extensive variety of influences, from quantum social theory, through cold war history, critical pedagogy, psychoanalysis and just war theory, these articles offer a provocative set of analyses in response to the questions posed about authorship, authority and knowledge production more generally in CSS and critical IR. Although the differences between these papers are perhaps just as, if not more, important than the commonalities, key themes recur throughout linking what could otherwise appear a discordant set of interventions. In what follows we will outline both what unites these papers and what marks each as unique.

First and foremost, what emerges in all the papers to different degrees is an imaginary of *entanglement*. What we mean by this is that for each contribution, authors and authority are inseparable from the time and space, the material, normative, socio-economic, racialised and gendered conditions from which they emerge. We can see this very clearly in the first article, Michael P.A. Murphy's discussion of the insights quantum social theory can offer to our questions. Murphy explores how the very experiment that demonstrated the quantum nature of subatomic reality was a fortuitous accident prompted by a constellation of entangled factors. Though history records the experiment's authors in simple agential terms, creating and underlining their authority within the field, knowledge production was in fact the result of a highly peculiar interaction between social and material components, including the smoking of cheap cigars. The author *as such* is therefore a myth; it becomes, as Foucault specified, an ideological function that helps sustain a modern, liberal, individualised view of research, observation and the generation of knowledge. Quantum social theory therefore helps the critical scholar in security studies to recognise and reflect on their role as an "entangled observer, an intra-actor".

In challenging the continued dominance of white, male authority within CSS, quantum social theory's emphasis on entanglement is a promising ballast to existing postcolonial, decolonial and feminist challenges. Indeed, this is evident in the interplay between the Murphy and Managhan articles. Like Murphy, Tina Managhan also problematizes the notion of 'ideal observers' in reference to the recent controversies surrounding canonical figures in CSS and critical IR (see Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2020) as well as the ontological entanglements of identity. Managhan, however, adopts a critical psychoanalytic lens and uses it to probe our libidinal attachments to authors and authority, specifically in terms of questions of fidelity – asking *To whom and to what do we owe ("our" voice and "our" authority)? and Do some of us owe more than others?* Using these questions to prompt an analytical engagement with the charges of patricide (and related imputations) that have been directed at those who have recently challenged white, male authority within CSS, Managhan explores why, contrary to CSS' initial promise, white, male authority structures persist. And she points us towards a possibly more emancipatory path forward.

In contrast, Erzsebet Strausz's intervention demonstrates that we can come to see our entwining as an ambivalent influence, a source of both inspiration and paralysis. Strausz begins with a particular moment in which a confluence of forces came together in a classroom in 2022: an IR seminar that primarily deals in abstractions of war and organised violence; a multinational group of students, with many from the post-Soviet space; Russia's invasion of Ukraine, kicking off (or continuing) a major war in Europe; and the failure of 'expertise' and pedagogical authority to deal with this imbrication. Though paralysing, such an existential entanglement inspires Strausz to revisit Foucault's 'lesser' works and interviews in which he spoke of writing as a way to *discover* his own findings. With implications for pedagogy and

writing, Strausz elucidates that, far from the outcome of an author's singular thought and rigorous application of method, expertise and authoritative insights are the result of "often painstaking and always fragmentary negotiation of worlds colliding, coming together, falling out or falling apart."

However, just as the author/authority is a particular construction of a very specific entanglement, so too are those we silence, those authors and sources of authority marginalised from, or written out of, CSS and its formative history. Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest's article investigates such a silencing by challenging the standard narrative of CSS, that of a disruption emerging after the Cold War, revelling in the freedom to think beyond war, nuclear strategy and mutually assured destruction. In a sense, they flip Foucault back onto von Clausewitz: war remains politics and should not be forgotten by CSS. By paying more attention to the Cold War period, they argue, we can see the role of important figures, social movements and events emerging around key historical 'sites' that paved the way for CSS as we now know it. In particular, the 1955 Bandung Conference, the anti-nuclear campaigns of African Americans and the movements in Pan-Africanism surrounding French nuclear testing offer crucial insights into how colonialism, race and (nuclear) war became entangled long before decolonial theory made its way into CSS. Instead of foregrounding authors, a focus on historical sites of "global entanglement" can offer important context in the form of a pre-history of critical thought in the field. By centring the post-1989 era and its concerns to the exclusion of nuclear policy and the Cold War, we continue to silence racialised authors, politicians, events and sources of authority. As Murphy's article argues, we must ultimately take ethical responsibility for the 'cuts' we make in the entanglements that produce knowledge, including their racialised effects.

The foregrounding of entanglement in these articles therefore brings war (van Munster and Sylvest) and ethics (Murphy) back into frame. And these two issues are precisely the focus of Cian O'Driscoll's article, which closes the issue. Over and above the stress on entanglement, O'Driscoll draws our attention to the second theme that recurs throughout these articles: a focus on *experience* in determining the authority of the author in CSS. Whilst many of the articles in this issue mention ethics in passing, issues of morality, justice, right and wrong have rarely been the direct focus of work in CSS (see Bourne and Bulley, 2011). There has been a move to address this issue in recent years (e.g. Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2014; Nyman and Burke, 2016), but as O'Driscoll points out, this is often with direct reference to concepts developed from just war theorising. In doing so, they draw on the abstractions common to the discourse, abstractions such as just cause and non-combatant immunity, developed from juridical, theological and philosophical writings. Meanwhile, recent 'rationalist' accounts of just war go even further, dispensing with experience in favour of hypothetical scenarios and thought experiments. In a sense, the author becomes a floating authority, above and beyond the petty realm of experience. In contrast, O'Driscoll's article makes common cause with feminist accounts by directing out attention to the lived experience of those that *do* war, in particular the soldiers who supposedly do the 'just' and 'unjust' killing. He therefore turns to alternative authors as authorities, including the unusual novel-memoirs of Tim O'Brien to get us closer to the "existential truth" of war.

This attention to experience also reveals a note of tension between the various interventions in the issue. Murphy's deeply contextualised account of the author, their research, knowledge and authority also appears to foreground experience and the existential – especially through the stress on responsibility. But whereas for Murphy the social and material context become everything (at least to the extent that the author is effectively diffused through the broader research apparatus) for O'Driscoll, the novelist/memoirist offers an *alternative* source of truth. For O'Driscoll the existential does not supplant the rational, rather, it requires incorporation. In a sense, van Munster and Sylvest are making a similar case with regard to historical experience. Rather than arguing that war should once again replace other forms of threat as in more traditional approaches to security, they argue that CSS is in danger of throwing the

baby out with the bathwater: ignoring the importance of the Cold War, nuclear strategy and how they were experienced and resisted by racialised and marginalised groups within broad global entanglements. This risks a continued silencing of the experiences of those resistive minorities that were important to the rise of CSS and its concerns. Strausz, meanwhile, writes *directly* from her own pedagogical experience and the attempt to make sense of it when faced with a war that appears to surpass the wisdom and authority of critical security and IR. Here, the author as writer becomes pivotal; research becomes a process of self-reflectively negotiating experience alongside the possibility that the world could be otherwise, that we could be otherwise, and that both are acts of creation. The authority of truth and sense converts into something that can be fashioned and transformed in the act of writing, rather than something we discover first and subsequently narrate through our writing.

Where O'Driscoll, van Munster and Sylvest stress the importance of others' experience in generating authority, Murphy broadens the understanding of actors within that experience, and Strausz stresses the necessity of our own critical journey in making sense of it all. Managhan, meanwhile, adds another layer to the experience of authoring authority in CSS, a more internal, psychological one. Why, she asks, in the face of critique's continued lesson to challenge authority in all its forms, do we persist in structuring thought around the white, male authority of the discipline's Masters? To understand this, she argues, we require a psychoanalytic approach that makes sense of our experience as critical scholars that continue to desire the authority of that which we challenge and claim to displace. Only by understanding and celebrating the 'circulation of desire' do we find the possibility of carving out a space that does not dispense with CSS or its putative Masters and their racialised theorising, but allows for our own desire to remake authority by challenging them and saying 'no'. However, the prospects of developing such a space are not just down to authors.

Editing Authority

It should be clear that this introduction can offer no answers by way of conclusion, or certainly not to those questions it began with. Instead, we want to end by stepping away from the 'author' for a moment in order to reflect on the role of the 'editor'. At a certain point the two blur together anyway: as editors we are authors/originators of this special issue, its themes, concerns and questions. Beyond originators, though, in the case of an academic journal, the editor functions in a variety of roles, each of which is laden with undemocratic power hierarchies: *gatekeeper* for those who seek to enter the conversation or discipline, deciding who gets to speak or be heard in a particular forum and where a call for papers will and will not be advertised; *filter*, separating the good from the bad research, the work that needs more work from the work that can't be reworked and the work that has been overworked; *discipline-former* through the decisions made on which topics, questions and authors 'fit' or resonate and which do not; *curator* of the final product, its ordering and introduction. Editors ultimately get to decide who *is* an author and who is not, to *form* and reform those authors that make the grade, to *create* and constitute authority through decisions on acceptance, rejection, reviewers, themes and borderline calls.

For editors, sending out a general 'call for papers' is risky – you retain your gatekeeper function, but you are not in control of what you will receive. None of the papers in this issue were directly commissioned; as agreed with the journal editors, each author responded to the call by submitting an abstract that was assessed for 'fit' with the special issue, as well as for quality. The first 'cut' to contributions came at this point and it is important to acknowledge that, bar one, all those authors' whose abstracts were rejected at this point (all due to 'fit' with the special issue topic rather than potential quality), were female and/or from racialized minorities or non-European. This is a cause of significant concern.

Final submissions all went through a rigorous double-blind peer review process, though some commissioned contributions did not make it to this stage either because the final paper was not submitted, or it was desk-rejected. In both the latter two cases, once again, the authors were female and/or from racialized minorities. The same can also be said of a contribution that was rejected at the peer review stage. It is important to reflect on this process and how it has helped to curate a final product that is predominantly white, male and European. How have our decisions to advertise the call for papers on specific blogs and email lists contributed to this result? How have the academic conventions around author style and language, as well as editing and 'double blind' peer review, helped perpetuate the marginalization of already marginal groups? In what ways has this interrogation into authors and authority in CSS helped exclude those whose authority and authorship have long struggled to be heard or recognized?³

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to consider this issue fully and draw out all its aspects and implications. Rather, what we want to stress is that more needs to be done to critically reflect on how authority is generated and reproduced in editing processes, both within CSS and more broadly throughout academia. Ultimately, we recognize that despite its intentions, this special issue has made little or no practical contribution to opening IR and CSS to marginalized voices, making it less exclusive, less European, less male or less pale.⁴ To use the insights from Murphy's paper in this issue, the social and material context within which the idea for this special issue emerged are crucial to the final product. As colleagues at Oxford Brookes University whose offices are on the same floor, we work closely together in delivering a postgraduate model on international security and share many views on the discipline. We also share a similar intellectual trajectory. We were both educated in the space made possible by those white, male scholars in IR who partly inspired the birth of CSS (see Managhan's essay), thereby contributing to the silencing of alternative histories of the discipline drawn out in van Munster and Sylvest's article. We have also relied upon the authority of similar philosophers, particularly Foucault, in authoring our own work in the field. Indeed, it was initially in response to the moral panic within our department about the need to 'cancel' Foucault following the damaging allegations referenced above that we began thinking about the need to re-pose these questions on authors and authority in CSS. In advertising the call for papers, we unthinkingly relied on standard fora: BISA and ISA group mailing lists, personal contacts and blogs run by friends and colleagues. The final make-up of this special issue should not have come as a surprise: it is the result of our own experience and entanglements as authors and editors.

Our failure to contribute to the ongoing opening of IR and CSS does, however, offer important indicators for failing better in the future. These would include inviting an editor with different experience and entanglements to join a project like this from the start; advertising the call for papers in more geographically and disciplinarily diverse fora; directly commissioning key interventions from marginalized sources; working more intensively with contributors to make their interventions directly relevant before review; considering whether blind reviewing is necessary in every case. Others are no doubt doing better in this regard and starting from their experience rather than seeking to include it afterwards would have been preferable. We know that this is an issue of which some publishers and journal editors are fully aware. But, beyond this special issue, can we do more to tackle it? Can journals in critical IR and security studies take a leading role, instigating independent audits of their own practices? How is this possible given the pressure on budgets and editors who often carry out this work in their free time and with insufficient institutional support? Can evidence and case studies nonetheless be collected to demonstrate the scale of the problem and reveal how it might be tackled? In other words,

³ Thanks to Dr Sana Rahim for insights into this area and helping prompt our critical reflection on this process.

⁴ Thanks to two reviewers for insisting we make this more explicit, and the grounds for greater critical reflection.

is it time for venues of critical theory to engage in *problem-solving* action regarding the way we reproduce authors and authority that are so thoroughly gendered, classed and racialized?

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