

Spaces of Global Security: Beyond Methodological Nationalism

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Abstract

The changing political and social meanings of space under conditions of advanced globalization point to the need to analyze security—or the deployment and management of violence—as a socio-spatial practice. This article draws attention to the “methodological nationalist” bias that has traditionally characterized mainstream security studies, and discusses its effect on how security issues are studied and conceptualized. Building on insights from political geography and sociology, the article makes the case for a “spatial turn” in the field. It demonstrates how a socio-spatial approach can help make sense of evolving state security practices, and presents examples of non-national spaces of security—including cities, cyberspace, and the global polity. Such spaces are increasingly objects of security practices, although the implications of this remain largely under-theorized in security studies.

Keywords: space, cities, cyberspace, globalization, methodological nationalism, socio-spatial, security practices

Introduction

A drone operator sitting in Nevada, in the United States, operates a remote device that kills a human target thousands of miles away in Afghanistan; a boat filled with Eritrean refugees trying to migrate to Europe collapses in the Mediterranean; a French gunman trained in Yemen by al-Qaeda assassinates cartoonists in Paris;¹ a Swedish neo-Nazi battles Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine;² a violent organization attempting to establish an Islamic caliphate posts videos of a West London man killing American and Japanese humanitarian workers in Syria; and a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee camp for 350,000 Somali refugees is threatened with

closure by the Kenyan government following a terrorist attack on a university.³

These are some of the modes of violence that characterize the contemporary global security environment. What is notable about them, in addition to the human devastation accompanying each incident, is the analytical challenge they pose to traditional approaches to security. None of these incidents are clear examples of either interstate conflict or civil war; each of these incidents links very different spaces together in ways that defy a “national security” logic; all of these cases call into question some of the basic spatial assumptions that undergird much of the scholarly literature in security studies. Collectively, they direct our attention toward other “spaces of security,” such as refugee camps, the high seas, cyberspace, and cities, as well as the “global” itself as a coherent political space.

1 David Gauthier-Villars, Noémie Bisserbe, and Julian E. Barnes, “Suspect in Charlie Hebdo Attack Was Trained in Yemen,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 2015.

2 Dina Newman, “Ukraine Conflict: ‘White Power’ Warrior from Sweden,” *BBC News*, July 16, 2014.

3 Duncan Miriri, “Kenya Demands UN Remove Massive Refugee Camp,” *Reuters*, April 11, 2015.

The inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global Security Studies* presents an opportunity to reframe how we think about security. The very name of the journal spurs us to move beyond the nation-state as the sole focus of security practices and discourses and thereby suggests possibilities for theorizing alternative topographies of security. It opens up “the global” and its constituent parts to interrogation and analysis, and by doing so urges us to raise questions about *where* security practices and discourses are located, thus allowing us to juxtapose actors and connect processes that operate in very different physical (or virtual) locales.

In my contribution to this special issue, I argue that the future of global security studies requires a “spatial turn.” As security scholars we miss—in the words of Waltz (1986, 329)—a lot of “big and important things” by not taking seriously the spatial dimensions of security. Despite a great deal of literature on the territorial nature of the state in international relations (IR) and political geography (e.g., Ruggie 1993; Agnew 1994, 2003; Agnew and Corbridge 1995; Sjoberg 2008; Elden 2009, 2013; Ingram and Dodds 2009), the field of security studies has yet to fully embrace the notion of security as a socio-spatial practice—one that increasingly takes place in post-national and non-national spaces.

What does a “spatial turn” mean in practice? First and foremost, it does *not* mean that we should throw out the state, state interests, or state practices, all of which are very much still at the core of global security concerns and need to be analyzed as such. It does, however, mean that we should not fetishize and reify the “national” as the *only* space in which security practices and discourses are formed and take place. It means identifying and theorizing non-national spaces of security and analyzing how these interact with state practices and with each other. And it means paying attention to how the socio-spatial practices of security change over time and how they vary with the changing social meanings and constructions of space that accompany new technologies, rises in social connectivity, and increased “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989).

Such a project—a “spatial turn” in security studies—does not necessarily map on to any particular normative or theoretical agenda in the field. Realists; liberal internationalists; globalists; cosmopolitans; feminists; transnationalists; relationalists; network analysts; scholars of civil war, insurgency, or terrorism; and academics or practitioners interested in broadening and deepening notions of security can all benefit in different ways from paying more attention to the geographical and socio-spatial dimensions of security. For example, realist approaches can gain from a “spatial turn” in security

studies through a focus on the spatial dimensions of the exercise of state power, such as the emergence of global networks of military bases and their effects (Cooley 2005, 2008); the dynamics and implications of drone warfare; or the efforts of state actors to mobilize diaspora populations (Adamson 2006; Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Gamlen 2008, 2014; Ragazzi 2009, 2014). Security scholars who study non-state actors, transnational networks, and contentious politics can utilize a spatial approach to gain insight into how these actors, networks, and processes are shaped or even constituted by the resources and opportunities embedded in particular locales (such as global cities or cyberspace, both discussed later in this article). I do not attempt here to provide a comprehensive survey of how a “spatial turn” contributes to each of these varied research agendas. Instead, I suggest its potential as a lens through which to engage with contemporary security issues, and I identify some significant “non-national” spaces of global security.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, I introduce the concept of “methodological nationalism” and explain how it institutionalizes a particular “spatial bias” in security studies. Second, I suggest the means to address this bias by instigating a “spatial turn” in the field. I draw on insights from geographers and sociologists who have theorized the nature of space, its construction, and its effects on social practices, as well as on work in international relations (IR) informed by political geography. I argue that we can use insights developed in these literatures to gain a better understanding of the spatial dimensions of state practices and how they interact with non-national spaces. I then identify and elaborate on three non-national spaces—global cities, cyberspace, and the global polity. These three “spaces of security” are meant to be illustrative but not exhaustive. Nevertheless, they are all emerging as significant spaces of global political engagement that are also objects of security practices, and thus are ripe for further empirical research in security studies. Finally, I conclude with some additional thoughts on what a “spatial turn” brings to security studies.

Methodological Nationalism and Security Studies

In two important pieces, Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller have made the case that the contemporary social sciences are biased by their reliance on the assumptions of “methodological nationalism.” Although their argument was aimed primarily at scholars of migration and transnationalism, it is also helpful for illuminating an underlying bias in security studies.

Methodological nationalism may be defined as “the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences” and “the assumption that the state/nation/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 301; 2003, 576). Methodological nationalism, they argue, has resulted in three types of bias that are widespread in the social sciences: (1) ignoring or disregarding the fundamental importance of nationalism for modern societies... (2) naturalization, that is, taking for granted that the boundaries of the nation-state delimit and define the unit of analysis, and (3) territorial limitation, which confines the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state.” These three biases interact to form “a coherent epistemic structure, a self-reinforcing way of looking at and describing the social world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 577–78). Furthermore, “[s]cholars who share this intellectual orientation assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interest with the purposes of social science. Methodological nationalism reflects and reinforces the identification that many scholars maintain with their own nation-states” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 576).

Methodological nationalism, or the naturalization and reification of the nation-state as a sociological form, is arguably what allows security scholars and others to think of a world of nation-states as the starting point for analysis. States are either conceptualized as “actors” (corporate agents) or “arenas” (territorial spaces). Indeed, these two aspects of “stateness” are often conflated in the literature, leading to methodological imprecision and confusion—“China” sometimes refers to a geographic place, and sometimes refers to an actor or agent. This is arguably because nationalism—an ideology that binds an identity to a particular territorial structure—suggests that political identity and territory are coterminous.

Nationalism is still largely ignored or left under-theorized as a constitutive element of state corporate agency in world politics. Taken to its logical end, this leads to claims of anthropomorphism in which “states are people, too” (Wendt 1999, 2004; Mitzen 2006, 2013; Berenskoetter 2014). Moreover, there are few fields of study in which scholars are as identified with their own state’s interests as security studies, especially in approaches that combine analysis with policy recommendations. One is hard-pressed to imagine an article in a contemporary English language security studies journal ending with policy recommendations for how al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS) could more effectively

mobilize support, or with advice as to how Russia or China could best contain American power.

Paradoxically, realists such as Kenneth Waltz, in his earlier work, were more cognizant of the important role played by nationalism in producing the unitary state. Waltz recognized the importance of nationalism as a constitutive element of corporate agency in *Man, the State and War* (1954, 175–76) (although this element was later dropped in *Theory of International Politics*; Waltz 1979) and noted that “it does violence to one’s common sense to speak of the state, which is after all an abstraction and consequently inanimate, as acting.” He justified his treatment of the state as a unitary actor by taking what was essentially a constructivist position—focusing on the importance of the strength and nature of group sentiment or collective identity, specifically the group sentiment that is produced historically through a combination of modern technology and the emergence of nationalism as a unifying political ideology:

The existence of group patriotism has no special meaning for our analysis until... it becomes infused with the idea of nationality. Then we have the immensely important fact of modern nationalism... the growth of nationalism is synonymous with the integration of the masses into a common political form... With the development of modern technology, especially as applied to the means of transportation and communication, it has become possible for the interests of individuals to be thought of as tightly complementary... The centripetal force of nationalism may itself explain why states can be thought of as units.

States could, therefore, be understood as “units” because they were held together by a collective identity, expressing that common identity and purpose in such a way that “the state appears to other states as a unit” (Waltz 1954, 178). Ultimately, this is an argument about how a particular historical configuration of communications technology allows states to be conceptualized as territorially defined corporate agents.

When the assumptions of methodological nationalism are brought together with insights from the literature on state-building, we can elucidate the underlying relationship that has historically existed between nationalism and security practices in contemporary states. Contemporary nation-states are the historical products of the use of large measures of violence to set and maintain state borders, to produce and reproduce national identities, and to define and control populations, who become understood as “nationals” (Weber 1978; Tilly 1990; Torpey 1998, 241). The emergence of modern nation-states has been accompanied, in many cases, by ethnic cleansing, population exchanges, genocide, and

programs of assimilation and homogenization (Arendt 1948 [1973]; Zolberg 1983; Rae 2002; Mann 2005). Furthermore, the project of national state-building itself was motivated in large part by the need to mobilize resources and human capital to support large-scale warfare (Tilly 1990; Spruyt 1994).

The deployment of high levels of violence continues to undergird state practices and identities, with states reproducing their identities and borders via the use of coercive practices. “States dispose of a large arsenal of coercive tools to force their version of society on the population,” writes Wimmer (2013, 70). Citing Appadurai (1998), he adds, “violence makes clear, in a complex situation of overlapping group membership, on whose loyalty one can rely. Violence marks ‘them’ off ‘from us,’” demarcating the dangerous tumor from the healthy flesh of the nation’s body” (Wimmer 2013, 71). Violence thus operates as a way of reifying and maintaining symbolic boundaries and collective identities, but also as a way of disrupting them. Weak actors, as well as strong actors, use violence to define and solidify identity boundaries. In fact, the use of violence is arguably one of the most effective ways to transform “blurred” (i.e., porous and negotiable) boundaries into “bright” (i.e., fixed and nonnegotiable) ones (Alba 2005).

This understanding of the relationship between violence and collective identities suggests some serious weaknesses and blind spots in some of the traditional state-centric approaches to security studies. Much of the scholarship in security studies has viewed “security” as being largely about the policies and practice of one “unit” or “actor” responding to threats or violence from another “unit” or “actor.” This, however, misses the role that security and violence themselves have played in boundary making, and how they structure discourses and practices that contribute to the production and maintenance of collective identities. Indeed, national security discourses routinely contain language and rhetoric that is intended to delineate the “other” or create an enemy image—in other words, discourses designed to define and enforce “bright” and nonnegotiable boundaries. This demarcation of the “other” plays a key role in producing and maintaining identities that form the basis for security strategies (Campbell 1992; Neumann 1996). For example, one need only think of US President George W. Bush’s post-9/11 “with us or against us” rhetoric or Barack Obama’s labeling of IS as a “cancer” that needs to be eliminated.⁴

Within the context of the nation-state, violence, collective identity, and territory come together in a particular *spatial* configuration in which a political unit can be conceived of as a territorially defined corporate agent. This historical convergence allows for the emergence of particular forms of theorizing in which questions of spatiality, identity, and the construction and maintenance of collective “actorhood” (stateness) fall by the wayside. The constitutive dimension of corporate agency can be left untheorized, resulting in a particular spatial ontology of nation-states as units and actors.

What is the significance of this for security studies? First, methodological nationalism has the effect of structuring the field of security studies in particular ways, from how war itself is defined to how quantitative datasets, such as The Correlates of War Project (COW), are produced. Wars are spatialized and coded as either taking place “between” states or “within” states—thus disregarding the socio-spatial dimensions of how wars are *actually* fought. Contemporary drone warfare, for example, leads to the complete physical separation of the combatant from the battlefield, the battlefield from a war, and the combatant from civil society (Wilcox 2015). Counterinsurgency strategies and equipment used in distant locales can return “home” and be applied to domestic populations via the militarization of policing, where social protest is likened to a nascent insurgency.⁵ These connections between battlefield strategies and domestic surveillance and policing are lost in traditional approaches to security.

Similarly, a methodological nationalist bias renders invisible cases in which the center of gravity (Clausewitz 1989) of a “civil war” actually exists external to a state. The spatial dimensions of civil wars in states such as Kosovo, Sri Lanka, and Turkey have all shifted over time, with external actors, such as diaspora populations in Europe or North America, playing a more or less significant role in providing resources and support for the conflicts (Brun and Van Hear 2012; Koinova 2013). The “external” dimensions of “internal” conflicts are obscured in traditional nation-state models of security. Similarly, a “local conflict” that would be more accurately analyzed as a manifestation of larger structural and systemic factors (Hironaka 2005) may be misunderstood due to a dominant spatial imaginary that treats the state as the space *where* civil wars take place (i.e., within state boundaries).

Quantitative studies of “the democratic peace” are similarly spatialized, treating states as autonomous units

4 Michael D. Shear and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Obama, ‘Appalled’ by Beheading, Will Continue Airstrikes,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2014.

5 Thanks to Alexander Montgomery for these examples.

that exist in a fictional reality disembedded from larger global forces—and which ignore spatially “inconvenient” dynamics such as covert and proxy wars (Barkawi and Laffey 1999). Much of the literatures on foreign policy, rational bargaining, deterrence, and compellence are also undergirded by a methodological bias that obscures processes of internal state mobilization, cohesion, and repression—a point that was made early on by security scholars who studied “third world” states (David 1991; Ayoob 1997).

A focus on security practices, discourses, and relations, rather than spatially predefined actors and units, allows for the possibility of bringing alternative “spaces of security” into the mainstream of security studies. A socio-spatial approach to security studies understands territorial nation-states to be only one of many “spaces” that are constituted through practices of violence, and thus directs us to look at the relationship between “boundary-making” and security as it occurs in a wider variety of (non-national) spaces. Taking a lead from history, geography, anthropology, and other disciplines, it is time for security studies to “go global.” Scholars need to rethink how the field orients itself to fundamental questions about how physical and social spaces are constructed and imagined, and the concomitant implications of this for theorizing security.

New Spaces of Global Security

Nation-states are historical constructions that bring together (national) identities and practices of violence in territorialized socio-spatial configurations. States continue to be naturalized as the dominant “spaces” of security in IR and security studies. Yet, advanced conditions of globalization are creating new spaces in which identity and security come together in ways that still have not been fully theorized. Paying attention to these new spaces does not mean throwing out the state as a key security actor or locus of security practices, adopting a naïve form of globalism, or committing oneself to a spatial determinism (Porter 2015). It does, however, require that one understand the changing spatial dimensions of state practices and the exercise of state power, and analyze how these interact with other “spaces of global security.”

Space is as much a construct as it is a physical entity. Geographers, such as Lefebvre (1991 [1974]), Harvey (1989, 2000, 2006), and Soja (1989), have distinguished between the spaces of capitalism, especially as they emerge in urban contexts, and other conceptualizations of space, such as religious spaces infused with sacred meanings (see Hassner 2003, 2009). Massey (2005) extends these notions by examining the ways in which

contemporary spaces are sites of multiple and interlinking power relations that operate at many levels, from the micro-level of the physical body to the local, national, and global levels. These levels can be thought of as scales and scalar processes and are helpful for mapping out the complexities of spatial arrangements in ways that are more sophisticated than a simple levels-of-analysis approach (Sjoberg 2008). Space is always defined and constituted by a multiplicity of heterogeneous relations and interactions, including practices of violence. What William Sewell (2001, 51–52) argues regarding the literature on contentious politics can be equally applied to security studies, which has “treated space as an assumed and unproblematized background, not as a constituent aspect that must be conceptualized explicitly and probed systematically” (see also Martin and Miller 2003; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008).

Theorizing the socio-spatial dimensions of particular practices has been usefully employed as a means of gaining greater analytical leverage across a number of other issue areas in international politics. Smirl (2008, 2015), for example, has examined the importance of the socio-spatial in the construction of contemporary “spaces of aid” and “humanitarian spaces.” Examining how humanitarian aid is physically and spatially organized helps illuminate aspects of identity and power relations, as it often acts as a spatial representation of larger North–South inequalities. Spaces of confinement, such as the refugee camp, separate out victim populations, while aid workers congregate in the lobbies of international hotels and drive around in white sports utility vehicles (SUVs). Forms of spatial confinement affect the human security of millions of individuals around the world and represent a particular form of exercising power—of separating out “them” from “us.” For example, the spread of detention practices and so-called “black sites” across a variety of states was an integral part of post-9/11 counterinsurgency strategies, but detention has also been a response to irregular migration, refugee flows, and domestic crime. Seen in aggregate, such spaces of confinement and detention collectively constitute a distinctive type of space and form of securitization of populations that is widespread across the globe (Khalili 2012; Lundby 2015).

Spaces of humanitarian crises and tourism have come together in physical locales such as the Italian island of Lampedusa or the Greek islands of Kos and Lesbos, as desperate migrants inhabit the same space as European holidaymakers.⁶ On the other side of the Mediterranean,

6 “How Many More Can Kos Take?” *Daily Mail*, May 27, 2015.

similarly disjointed scenes of tourists and armed violence came together in attacks on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis and the beach resorts of Sousse. Such incidents suggest the need to expand our view of how we think about *where* security practices take place, how security relates to different types of spaces, what the political implications of this are, and how it relates to the future of global security. In order to further explore some of these issues, the rest of this section looks more closely at three “non-national” spaces of global security that are ripe for further elaboration.

Global Cities

If the particular spatial configuration of the nation-state epitomized modernity, global cities may epitomize the era of advanced globalization. Global cities have caught the attention of geographers, sociologists, and scholars of migration as important drivers of globalization processes and markers of a new global landscape (Friedmann and Wolff 1982; Chase-Dunn 1984, 1985; Friedmann 1986; Castells 1989; Acuto 2011).⁷ As “spaces” in the contemporary world economy, cities increasingly rival states as sites of political, economic, and cultural power. The concept of the global city, associated with the work of Saskia Sassen (1991), was an attempt to rethink the geography of contemporary globalization by examining the consequences of the simultaneous dispersion and concentration of global economic activities in urban metropolises. As the world population becomes increasingly urbanized, the combination of dispersion and concentration means that global cities can be viewed as microcosms of broader global power relations, bringing together—in close proximity—powerful global elites and large underclasses in concentrated spaces.

Cities are also sites of institutional density and concentrated resources in the form of government offices, cultural institutions, media outlets, transnational corporations, international organizations (IOs), and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). They are spaces in which the “local” and the “global” come together—where decision-making, agenda-setting, cultural production, and identity-formation processes occur in ways that have ramifications beyond the confines of the city, as they extend outward to a transnational political sphere. Major global institutions, for example, are not free-floating but are rather embedded in particular geographic spaces. These are largely urban and metropolitan, meaning that the institutional geography of world politics is also a topography of urban spaces.

Many of the world’s mega-cities boast populations that are greater than those of nation-states. They attract flows of global capital and labor in the form of both international finance and international migration. By attracting both capital and labor, cities perform roles as nodes in networks of global capital, and act as nodes in international migration networks and global diaspora politics. The urban geography of the city thus reflects and replicates many of the broader structural inequalities and power relations found in the international system as a whole, but in a concentrated and condensed space (Harvey 1973, 2000, 2012; Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Sassen 1991; Massey 2007). Cities are characterized by myriad “frictions” that are produced when diverse global connections come together in particular locales (Tsing 2004). The multiple types of networks that come together and converge in close proximity can also lead to an “implosion of a range of systemic contradictions into the physical sites of global cities” (Curtis 2011, 1924).

Global cities are sites of “superdiversity,” containing populations with ties around the world (Vertovec 2007). In London, for example, 37% of the population is foreign born, which is similar to rates for New York, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, Toronto, Sydney, and other major global cities.⁸ The presence of globally linked populations, along with the symbolic role that cities play as sites or nodes in networks of power in the world economy, make them important arenas of global identity politics that transcend homogenizing forms of national identity. As sites of power in the global economy, they are spaces that allow for access to global institutions, resources, and media.

Major cities act as nodes that connect dispersed activists in globally coordinated protests or campaigns. For example, following military action against the LTTE in Sri Lanka in 2009, coordinated protests by Tamil groups abroad took place in London; Toronto; Paris; New York; Washington, DC; Sydney; Melbourne; Geneva; Berlin; Zurich; Oslo; Copenhagen; and The Hague (Adamson and Kumar 2014). Mega cities are important spaces for global agenda setting and the formation of global public opinion due to the presence of global media. All things being equal, events that take place in London, Paris, New York, Cairo, or Istanbul are more likely to receive media coverage and shape global public discourse than events that occur in more peripheral regions of the global economy.

8 Information taken from 2011 UK Census, 2011 US Census, and worldcitiescultureforum.com, accessed December 12, 2014.

7 Parts of this section draw on Adamson and Koinova (2013).

At the same time, and for similar reasons, cities are also becoming important objects of security policy. Cities are increasingly characterized by surveillance and by the introduction of policing technologies designed to manage urban protest. They have their own security strategies; are engaged in networks of resilience to deal with terrorism or natural disasters; and work closely with their counterparts around the globe in areas such as police exchanges and cooperation. Security policies that emerge in one city (such as New York's "zero-tolerance" policies under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the 1990s) are diffused and emulated by other cities. Formal and informal networks of cities such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Making Cities Resilient Campaign⁹ or the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative encourage exchanges between cities and promote a sharing of practices.¹⁰

Cities and their workspaces, transport systems, public spaces, and shopping malls have also become focal points for larger global struggles. The rise in asymmetric warfare and irregular combatants renders traditional "national" security policies ineffective in protecting urban infrastructures and populations (Sassen 2010). One need only think of violent attacks that have occurred in New York, Paris, London, Madrid, Istanbul, Beirut, Nairobi, Bangkok, Jakarta, and Mumbai. Such attacks receive global media coverage and take on a symbolic dimension in public discourse, playing into larger global narratives and discourses. Cities can be desirable targets due to the density of their infrastructure and population, but also due to the symbolic role they play as repositories of global power, finance, and culture. The paradoxical and multifaceted dimensions of global cities—as spaces of cosmopolitanism and capitalism, as well as spaces marked by intense inequalities, increasing surveillance, policing, and securitization—make them key spaces for theorizing contemporary security. Cities are at once embedded in particular national spaces and contexts and subject to the jurisdiction of national governments. But they also transcend these national spaces. Cities are quasi-autonomous centers of global power: they develop independent relations with other cities, have their own urban identities, and can implement autonomous security policies. In some respects, cities are becoming actors in their own right—competing with one another for resources and

status, forming alliances, and joining global institutions—all behaviors that should not surprise either realists or liberal internationalists.¹¹

Cyberspace

Cyberspace is a new type of political space that has been "created through technological innovation" and acts as "a venue that allows users to engage in activities conducted over electric fields whose spatial domains transcend traditional territorial, governmental, social and economic constraints" (Choucri 2012, 6). Similar to global cities, cyberspace and social media function as important platforms of agenda setting and political contestation in the emerging global public sphere. Cyberspace, like global cities, can reflect global power relations, but in a different structural (nonterritorial) space in which connectivity and links are the currency of power and influence. Cyberspace is an arena in and of itself in which *forms of politics take place*—on websites, in chat rooms, and in other virtual spaces or platforms (Adamson and Kumar 2014).

The effect of cyberspace on power distribution is not predetermined but rather varies across cases. For example, in comparing the effect of cyberspace on structures of global finance and structures of global activism, Sassen (2012, 459) notes that in the case of finance, cyberspace has simultaneously elevated the power of "subnational scales such as the global city, and supranational scales, such as global markets, where previously the national scale was dominant"—but in a way that increasingly concentrates power and resources in the hands of a few by circumventing state regulatory agencies and exacerbating global inequalities. The opposite is the case in the political realm, where weak and previously isolated locally embedded activists can "go global," forming coalitions and alliances with other actors online, thus engaging in transnational action without physically moving. Social scientists have traditionally associated the "local" with physical or geographic proximity, embedded in a nested hierarchy that includes the "national" and the "global." But new technologies disrupt these hierarchies by enabling "multiscalar transactions and simultaneous interconnectivity among those largely confined to a locality." Local actors can become enmeshed in global networks without having to move, as local settings become "microenvironments on global circuits" (Sassen 2012, 466, 468).

Global power relations provide the context for and inform the politics of cyberspace. For example, online

9 See <http://www.unisdr.org/we/campaign/cities>, accessed October 3, 2015.

10 See <http://www.100resilientcities.org/#/-/>, accessed October 3, 2015.

11 I thank Timothy Crawford for making this observation.

identity politics are largely conducted in English, with key nodes and websites located in the global North (Kumar 2012; Adamson and Kumar 2014). Politics conducted online can bypass state authorities or censorship laws by using international servers, in a kind of virtual “boomerang effect” (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The role of social media in the Arab Spring has been well studied, but there are numerous other examples of “long-distance” political mobilization (Anderson 1998) that take place via social media sites. The Islamist group *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, for example, maintains a global media presence via its office and website in London, although it is banned in many other countries.

Tamil activists were able to avoid Sri Lankan censorship by running websites from locations such as Toronto and London (Whitaker 2004; Kumar 2012). The World Wide Web thus becomes a nonterritorial space for the enactment of identity politics accompanied by new forms of symbolic politics and boundary maintenance activities. Such activities transcend the territorial boundaries of states, although they are nevertheless affected by and reflect the geopolitics of the interstate system. In many cases, territoriality continues to play an important symbolic role in online politics via the use of alternative maps and cartographic images (Kurdistan, Khalistan, Kashmir, Palestine, Tamil Eelam, the Islamic Caliphate) to contest dominant geopolitical narratives and provide a counter-hegemonic virtual alternative to existing territorial-judicial realities. Online politics can, however, also replicate “off-line” politics through the creation of virtual spaces that mirror or extend, rather than challenge, existing community structures. Some Sikh actors, for example, have created virtual spaces that replicate existing physical spaces, such as the *Gurdwara* (temple) or Langar Hall (community gathering place for meals attached to temples) (Singh 2006; Adamson and Kumar 2014). Virtual space can also function as an arena in which non-state actors recruit members or mobilize political support, disseminating images electronically that are designed to galvanize virtual audiences (Bolt 2012). This is not limited to nonviolent actors, as the example of the online recruiting activities of IS makes all too clear (Hoskins, Awan, and O’Loughlin 2011).¹²

Like cities, virtual space is also increasingly being securitized—both through the extensive surveillance and monitoring by state agencies (such as the US National Security Agency) or multinational corporations but also as an arena itself of conflict between

various mixes of state and non-state actors, through cyberwarfare, cyberattacks, and so-called “cyber exploitation” (Kello 2013). Even if the threat of “cyberwar” has been exaggerated in some quarters, the impact of cyberspace as a *discrete and new type of space* that exists quasi-autonomously from the territorial world of states has been underappreciated. Studies of cyberwarfare, for example, have tended to focus on the physical damage that cyberattacks could cause to territorial state interests (Gartzke 2013), rather than taking a long-term perspective on the underlying impact that cyberspace has on the formation of new transnational identities (Betz 2014), and its potential to delegitimize official state narratives and identities, thus affecting the ability of state actors to reproduce the social cohesion that undergirds statist models of corporate agency.

The aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris, for example, not only spilled into virtual space via the online #JeSuisCharlie hashtag, but also spurred the online “hacktivist” group Anonymous to threaten cyberwarfare against so-called jihadi websites. Remarkably, in the week following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, French authorities reported that 19,000 websites had been hacked in France—an unprecedented scale of coordinated hacking incidents.¹³ Only a few days after the attacks, a group claiming to be IS hacked into US Central Command social media sites, doing little damage, but receiving global news coverage, especially given that it followed an incident in which the US-based branch of the Sony corporation was allegedly hacked and threatened by North Korea.¹⁴

Cyberspace is a distinct form of space that interacts and coexists with the world of territorial states but it does not function as the state system does and, therefore, cannot be reduced to it. As Kello (2013, 7) notes, “it is unclear how conventional security mechanisms, such as deterrence and collective defense” apply in cyberspace. Such rationalist models depend on the “bright boundaries” of a clearly delineated actor based on a collective identity that can be engaged with strategically. Cyberspace, via its networked structure, challenges the traditional division between “insider” and “outsider” that have accompanied the rise of the nation-state. The

12 See also Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS and the Lonely Young American,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2015.

13 Andrew Griffin, “Charlie Hebdo: France Hit by 19,000 Cyberattacks Since Paris Shootings in Unprecedented Hacking Onslaught,” *The Independent*, January 15, 2015.

14 Dan Lamothe, “U.S. Military Social Media Accounts Apparently Hacked by Islamic State Sympathizers,” *Washington Post*, January 13, 2015.

technologies of nationalism, which produced “imagined communities” via print capitalism, relied on the simultaneity of the shared experience of participating in a largely unseen yet still territorially delineated community via engagement with a national language press (Anderson 1983). In the context of advanced globalization, imagined communities can stretch far beyond the state and into wholly new spaces (Deibert 1997). This both increases global connectivity and leads to the emergence of global publics and a global public sphere, but may simultaneously lead to new forms of fractionalization, rivalry, and identity-based political contestation that do not correspond to specific territorial locations. Increased connectivity empowers weaker non-state actors, allowing for tactical innovations that challenge the nature of conventional warfare and in which conflicts become “less contests of arms than wars of hearts and minds conducted on a mass scale through multimedia communications networks” (Betz 2014).

The Global Polity

Finally, I discuss the possibility of the “global polity” as a discrete *space* that needs to be better conceptualized in relation to security. The “international level” of world politics has always played an important role in traditional security studies, often via the notion of anarchy (Waltz 1954, 1979; Wolfers 1961; Milner 1991; Donnelly 2015). But it has functioned as a socially thin space that is notable largely for its *lack* of clear institutional or political structures. The lack of theorization of the international exemplifies *par excellence* the extent to which traditional security studies has treated space as an unproblematic background to state-centric world politics, such as balance-of-power and power politics struggles among nation-states.

However, there are many other imaginings and constructions of “the global” in the study of world politics beyond that of international anarchy (Booth 2008; Walker 2010). Liberals have long had a more complex view of the international as a space in which anarchy and conflict could be transcended via shared norms and international institutions, as well as commerce and trade (Angell 2006). Kantian perspectives on the international hold out the possibility of a republican zone of peace—a vision that has been taken up by a variety of constructivist and republican theorists (Doyle 1986; Wendt 1999; Deudney 2007). Globalists speak of a “flat” and “borderless world” in which global capital and finance can, thanks to technology, move across the world in an instant (Ohmae 1999; Friedman 2005), whereas Marxist-influenced theorists have examined the world

as consisting not of states-in-anarchy, but rather of a core and periphery, connected via hierarchical relations of global elites (Wallerstein 2004). These approaches differ radically from neorealist approaches in their focus on the role of “uneven and combined development” in structuring the international, as opposed to the structural feature of “anarchy” (Rosenberg 2013a, 2013b).

Social constructivists and scholars influenced by public international law and the Groatian tradition have also developed richer notions of the world as a space defined by constitutional structures and shared identities—or what English School scholars refer to as an International Society. In this perspective, warfare and diplomacy are not merely behaviors that take place within the space of the international, but are social practices and institutions that constitute it as a social space (Bull 1977; Reus-Smit 1999; Wendt 1999). Normative approaches to the global provide even more benevolent visions of the world as a single political space defined by an emerging cosmopolitan democracy (Held 1995; Archibugi 2008) or, more holistically, as a living organism, Gaia or *Anima Mundi* (Lovelock 1995; Fidler 2014).

Sociological institutionalists, of course, have taken seriously the idea of a “world polity” that is “constituted by a distinct culture—a set of fundamental principles and models, mainly ontological and cognitive in character, defining the nature and purposes of social actors and action” (Boli and Thomas 1997). As distinct from actor-based approaches to IR, the state is treated not primarily as a “unit” but rather as a particular institutional form that has diffused across the planet and which is intertwined with other forms of rational bureaucracies, such as IOs and INGOs. Together, these organizations create a densely structured space that can be thought of as a world polity (Meyer et al. 1997).

In a sense, then, the world as a whole can be thought of as a political space—it is an aggregate of different and overlapping spaces, but also a coherent polity in and of itself. However, as security scholars, we still do not have a good sense of how to conceptualize and theorize the global polity as an integrated space. There are promising approaches for combining a global polity approach with other theoretical tools, such as social movement theory, social network theory, and relational or practice-based approaches (Jackson and Nexon 1999; Adamson 2005; Montgomery 2005; Goddard 2009; Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomey 2009; Kahler 2009; Nexon 2009; MacDonald 2014). Network-based approaches combine well with spatial analyses—network dependencies can be either constrained or enabled by particular types

of spatial relationships.¹⁵ Social movement theory and transnational contentious politics approaches employ the concept of political opportunity structures (Tarrow 1994, 2005), which also provides a means of mapping out power relations at the global level in a way that transcends state-centrism. Although the capitals of powerful states are important sites of power, they exist side-by-side with other power configurations, including IOs, powerful NGOs, and corporations, as well as spaces and nodes, such as global cities. Understanding how sites of power (many of which are physically located in the global North) intersect with global peripheries (in the global South, but also in marginalized enclaves in the global North) is a key question for contemporary security studies and should be of particular interest to those interested in the dynamics of transnational contention.

The study of diaspora politics (e.g., Shain and Barth 2003; Wayland 2004; Fair 2005; Lyons 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Koinova 2011, 2014; Adamson 2013) can be helpful in shedding light on some of these broader power imbalances that structure the global polity as a single space. Ong (2003), for example, has noted the problems and complications that arise when a global northern-based elite seeks to speak “on behalf” of “its” diaspora, as in the case of Chinese political entrepreneurs in the West mobilizing on behalf of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia following intercommunal violence in 1998. In that case, the global political activities of the largely US-based diaspora activists may have actually exacerbated ethnic tensions by tagging the local Chinese community’s identity as ethnically different from the majority population rather than as Indonesian. Similarly, online Palestinian identity politics is conducted predominantly in English or other European languages and directed toward Northern and Western audiences, with little or no presence of Palestinian migrant labor populations in Gulf States (Adamson and Kumar 2014).

Dispersed global diaspora populations are linked to each other (often via cyberspace) across very differently situated spaces in different parts of the globe, thus calling into question the relationships between identity and locale, or the socio-spatial and the geospatial. Scholars, for example, have distinguished between “near” and “far” diasporas that are connected via particular conflicts or instances of political mobilization. In the Liberian civil war of the last decade, the “far diaspora” located in the United States and the United Kingdom

was more enabled to engage in symbolic politics and was less a victim of physical violence than the regional Liberian refugee diasporas in neighboring Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Sierra Leone.¹⁶ Similarly, the experience of members of the Afghan diaspora in North America and Europe has been different from those in refugee camps in neighboring Pakistan (Harpviken 2008; Sperling 2013).

Tracing connections between post-national or non-national spaces, such as global cities, cyberspace, and global peripheries, also shows how different “spaces” in the global economy—both highly institutionalized and resource-rich, but also weakly institutionalized and resource-poor—become linked with each other strategically, as actors take advantage of the unique resources and opportunities that exist across various types of spaces. In armed conflicts, for example, lobbying, agenda setting, and public diplomacy may be used by non-state actors in global cities and in cyberspace, whereas global peripheries are used as “safe havens” for the training of insurgents and fighters. This is a pattern that was seen in the Kurdish and Kosovar conflicts in the 1990s, with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) engaging in political lobbying and agenda setting in the capitals of Europe and North America, while running military training camps in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley (for the PKK) and in Albania (for the KLA) (Watts 2004; Adamson 2005). Similar core-periphery dynamics exist with contemporary militant Islamist groups, who use weakly institutionalized peripheries and zones of conflict for safe havens or training camps, while engaging in recruitment and political mobilization activities in Europe and elsewhere. In this sense, the links that emerged between the Paris attack suspects in the *Charlie Hebdo* case and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, located in Yemen, as well as IS-controlled regions of northern Syria, are simply examples of larger dynamics that link spaces in the highly institutionalized core with conflict zones in weakly institutionalized peripheries (Adamson 2005).

Much like Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) “boomerang pattern,” in which NGOs exit one state to take advantage of transnational resources, opportunities and alliances in the global North, so, too, can armed insurgent organizations use this strategy to increase their influence and power (Adamson 2005; Bob 2005). The rise of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (Hegghammer 2013; Malet 2013; Bakke 2014), the concern about links

15 Thanks to Alexander Montgomery for raising this point.

16 I am indebted to Robtel Pailey for discussions on the Liberian diaspora.

between organizations and actors in Europe and conflict zones in the Middle East, and concerns about IS- and al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism around the world all suggest a security environment in which the “bright boundaries” of conflict do not fall neatly at state borders, but rather transcend and penetrate into states.

Of course, the “global” as a space is also increasingly becoming securitized in discourse and practice. The assertion of global dominance by powerful states via surveillance technology, drone warfare, new military technologies, and covert activities exists side-by-side with the global activities of non-state actors. Powerful states and military organizations struggle to create an appropriate language for describing the topography of a globalized security environment that is characterized by counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, and a lack of clear geographic boundaries with which to define “the enemy.” This results in the use of terms such as “sanctuaries,” “safe havens,” “operating environments,” “enabling environments,” and “terrain complexity”—terms that can be employed across contexts but may also obscure the complexities involved in delineating relevant geographical spaces of conflict (Innes 2008). With the 9/11 Commission Report (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004) declaring that “the American Homeland is the Planet,” with the US military aiming for “Full Spectrum Dominance,” with satellite technologies available to anyone via Google Earth, with a saturated 24/7 global media environment, and other technological developments, it is truly possible now to speak in terms of “global security.” In this new global reality, it is important to find ways of tracing global power relations beyond the “counting poles” approach of state-centric security studies and to find more nuanced ways to analyze how different spaces are linked to each other—urban contexts with conflict zones, virtual online spaces with off line political engagement, and transnational identity politics in the global North with armed conflict in the global South. This is a much more complex and variegated spatial reality than is portrayed in most models of security studies.

Conclusions

Why does the field of security studies seem, on the face of it, to provide so little analytical leverage for understanding the “globalization” of contemporary political violence? Standard categories, such as “interstate” and “intrastate,” do not adequately capture the complex security linkages that exist across seemingly dispersed locations in a world in which we see the blurring of

“external” and “internal” security concerns, accompanied by an ongoing securitization of new spaces and places of public and social life. State-centric approaches to security have, to a greater or lesser extent, operated with assumptions of “methodological nationalism” that treat the state as a natural social and political form. Relaxing assumptions of methodological nationalism in security studies allows us to better conceptualize security—or the deployment and management of violence—as a socio-spatial practice. It suggests new “spaces” of security that are ripe for further study.

What does this analysis imply for the future of global security? First, the analysis suggests the utility of extending the scope and lens of our object of study to include a wider range of spaces of security. This includes global cities, cyberspace, and the “global polity” but could (and should) also extend to other sites and spaces, such as refugee camps, humanitarian spaces, the high seas, and sites of detention and incarceration—to name but a few. The examples presented above of global cities and cyberspace illustrate how focusing on post- or non-national spaces can provide us additional analytical leverage on the contemporary security environment, but they are by no means exhaustive.

A “spatial turn” suggests the need to move beyond methodological nationalism to a richer and more variegated theorization of space. Such a theorization could be fruitfully married to already-existing approaches in human security, environmental security, and feminist approaches (e.g., Spike Peterson 1992; True 1995; Paris 2001; Sjoberg 2013; Enloe 2014), and also to approaches that focus on collective mobilization, networks, practices, and relationalism (Jackson and Nexon 1999; Neumann 2002; Sageman 2004; Slaughter 2004; Montgomery 2005; Pouliot 2008; Goddard 2009; Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomey 2009; Nexon 2009; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bigo 2011; Shapiro 2013; Bueger and Gadinger 2015; MacDonald 2014). Realist and state-centric approaches, however, would also benefit from paying greater attention to the changing spatial practices of states (such as drone warfare, cybersurveillance, and diaspora engagement policies), as well as how spatial transformations in the exercise of state power affect states’ relationships with each other, and with other actors in the global security environment.

Second, adopting a socio-spatial perspective on security is an initial step toward better understanding the relationship between identity politics, spatial practices, and shifts in the distribution of power across the global system, including how those impact on practices of

security under conditions of advanced globalization. Whereas the nation-state as a spatial configuration brings together identity, territory, and the management of lethal violence in such a way that it can be conceptualized as a unit, and that unit interacts with other similarly constituted “units,” this is only one possible spatial configuration of identity, territory, and violence. The notion of “ontological security” has been fruitful for understanding how a state reproduces its corporate identity in relation to other states (Giddens 1991; Mitzen 2006) and may become even more pertinent under conditions in which the corporate identity of states is increasingly challenged by market forces, transnational identities, global religious movements, and other nonterritorial identities.

Increased connectivity and a saturated global media environment have the potential to produce more general anxieties about space, control, the state, and territory. One of the features of a new globalized security environment is the lack of clear-cut territorially defined identity boundaries between “self” and “other” or “friend” and “enemy” in non-national spaces (Gros 2010). How actors respond to the “identity-blurring” effects of advanced globalization, the emergence of global identity politics, and “superdiversity” may be one of the key issues of the twenty-first century. The future of global security will therefore be closely linked to the politics of identity—that is, how skilled political leaders are at proactively engaging with global identity politics, fostering integration, and promoting dialogue across diverse identities—as opposed to reactively trying to reinforce bright boundaries via violence, demagoguery, polarizing language, or other means. The challenge is to nurture forms of social and cultural capital and to construct new narratives that foster a sense of collective identity and belonging under conditions of advanced globalization.

Third, the analysis suggests the need to pay much greater attention to alternative practices of security, including transformations in state security practices and discourses beyond conventional warfare. This includes the “micro-politics” and “micro-practices” of security that are connected to policing, surveillance, intelligence, and other sifting and disciplining mechanisms that operate across different types of spaces. Such practices increasingly securitize new spaces and places of public life and similarly correspond to the decoupling of identity, territory, and security. In liberal and non-national spaces, there is no explicit political “other” to be visualized or identified beyond vague references to non-identity and non-territorial categories of illiberalism (such as “violent extremism”). With a lack of ideological or identity basis for determining “friend–enemy” security distinctions,

highly technical sifting and surveillance processes come increasingly to the fore. Policing and surveillance (and resistance to policing) are certainly not new, but are gaining a new prominence in response to transformations in the broader socio-spatial context, and they are still undertheorized in the field of security studies (but see Andreas 2003; della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter 2006; Rosenberg 2006; Bigo 2011; Berenskoetter 2012).

Finally, the analysis calls into question theoretical distinctions between “materialist” or “rationalist” approaches to security versus “constructivist” or identity-based approaches. Such distinctions only make sense in cases in which “units” are already clearly defined as “actors.” Rationalist models of strategic bargaining and deterrence rely on already-constituted actors, with identities and interests that are naturalized to such an extent that the mix of symbolic and material micro-practices that undergirds and constitutes collective identity formation and corporate agency is rendered invisible. Rather than starting with pre-existing actors, security scholars also need to understand the underlying conditions under which security practices and the deployment of violence coincide with territorially defined collective identities, versus when violence can be used to transform “blurred” and porous boundaries into “bright” ones in alternative socio-spatial configurations. In doing so, the relationship between security, violence, and identity can be made clearer, and security can be better understood as one form of a boundary-making practice that takes on different logics in different spatial configurations.

A focus on post-national and non-national spaces of global security provides a means for security studies to move beyond the trappings of methodological nationalism. This article has suggested the utility of this approach by focusing on three such spaces. As I suggest above, there are many others. In addition, a focus on the spatiality of security discourses and practices can be helpful for understanding transformations in state security practices, including spatial transformations in the exercise of state power.

A theoretical focus on the relationship between spatial practices and the politics of security need not mean that we throw out the state as an important site of analysis, nor does it require us to fall into the trap of naïve globalism or spatial determinism (Porter 2015). Indeed, realist approaches to security can benefit from a “spatial turn” as much as other approaches to security—be they networked, human, feminist, liberal, or cosmopolitan approaches. Conditions of advanced globalization are reconfiguring both state and non-state spaces, allowing for the flourishing of new identities, the redistribution of power to new sites and actors, and the emergence of new post-national or

non-national spaces of security such as cities and cyberspace. Security studies in the twenty-first century could better reflect these trends by moving beyond a methodological nationalist lens and by embracing a “spatial turn.”

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