

The Challenge of Unintelligible Life: Critical Security Studies' Failure to Account for Violence Against Queer People

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Abstract

This article grapples with the inability of Critical Security Studies (CSS) to see and account for violence against queer people. It locates the absence of theorizing on anti-queer violence within existing critical security approaches in the failure to apprehend them as intelligible subjects or livable lives. It demonstrates these theoretical limitations through an exploration of Foucauldian frameworks within CSS, which inform dominant approaches to understanding violence. It also argues that the inability of CSS to account for anti-queer violence can be traced back to the presumption of an intelligible subject of violence on which any theoretical framework necessarily relies. The impossibility to account for anti-queer violence, due to the very nature of 'queerness', provides fruitful avenues for thought within CSS. This article therefore is a call for critical security scholars to take the challenge of unintelligible life seriously.

Keywords

Biopower; Critical Security Studies; disciplinary power; Judith Butler; Michel Foucault; Queer Theory; Subjectivity; Unintelligibility; Violence

Introduction

This article poses the question: Can Critical Security Studies (CSS) account for the global violence perpetrated against queer people? It takes as its starting point the insight that scholarship on anti-queer violence, or on queer people at all, is noticeably lacking within CSS. CSS encompasses a variety of approaches – most notably feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist perspectives. These strands of CSS, which draw extensively on the political thought of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, have generated large bodies of literature that investigate both state and non-state violence against a range of marginalized and vulnerable groups, including refugees, suspect communities, women and children, and prisoners of war. Nevertheless, queer people – one of the most targeted groups across the globe – rarely make appearances within this field of study.

More generally, this absence is surprising considering that the discipline of International Relations (IR) has been increasingly receptive to feminist and queer theory in recent years. However, feminist analyses of ‘gender-based violence’ rarely incorporate, or even acknowledge, the violence perpetrated against gender-variant people. Queer IR theory, on the other hand, has been more concerned with developing ‘queer IR methods’ (Weber, 2016b) than exploring the empirical realities and experiences of queer people internationally. Employing what Barthes refers to as the plural logic of the *and/or*, Weber’s formulation of a queer methodology for IR illustrates how the ‘sovereign man’ of sovereign statecraft is always already plural (Weber, 2016a). Weber refers to her theory as ‘queer’ because her entry point into theorizing plural IR figurations is the queer subject who fails to signify monolithically – an analytical move that is neither necessarily required for her theory to work nor retains the commitment to the queer political project. Similarly, Laura Sjoberg (2012) envisions queer IR theory as the ways in which ‘trans-theorizing’ can enrich already-existing debates within disciplinary IR. For Sjoberg, trans-theorizing should be taken seriously by IR scholars because it provides useful heuristic tools (through concepts like visibility, liminality, crossing, and disidentification) that may contribute to the study of world politics. I do not doubt queer analytics have significant implications for the study of migration, genocide, and war. However, it is often unclear how this work relates to the lives of queer people or to the queer political movement. It is the stripping of Queer IR from the traditions of queer theory and practice that led to an outcry against Cara Daggett’s (2015: 362) article entitled ‘Drone Disorientations’, in which she refers to drones as ‘genderqueer bodies’. My intention here is not to make normative pronouncements on the relative merits or dangers of such an approach to queer theorizing, but rather to note that queer IR theory has not been explicitly focused on the lives or emancipation of queer people and, by extension, has not sought to develop theoretical frameworks for understanding violence against queer people.

This insight raises the following question: How might we explain this gap within the literature? Is the absence of scholarship on the issue of anti-queer violence a mere oversight, or are there significant theoretical barriers to the production of such scholarship? This article argues that CSS is unable to account for anti-queer violence because its frameworks for understanding violence presuppose an already-existing, knowable subject, whether that subject be a disenfranchised refugee or an elite securitizing actor. I explore this dilemma in particular in relation to Foucauldian frameworks, which are arguably the most significant within CSS. However, the failure to account for violence against queer people, I argue, is not specific to any theoretical framework. Indeed, this violence exposes the impossibility of any unified theoretical framework that is capable of considering the violence against queer people – that is, those constitutively excluded from any single identity category. This is a challenge that critical security scholars ought to take seriously, and is one that can lead to richer, more instructive conceptualizations of violence.

Defining ‘queer’

The term ‘queer’ does not refer to a natural, singular, stable, and coherent identity, but rather undermines the very notion of identity. ‘Queer’ is associated with the multiplicities, potentialities, and subversions that characterize sexual and gender ambiguity. It is therefore perhaps most usefully characterized as a ‘non-identity’ (Hammers and Brown III, 2004: 95). Eve Sedgwick (1993: 8) captures this sense of non-identity when she describes the label ‘queer’ as ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically’. Importantly, ‘queer’ is not synonymous with labels such as ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, or ‘transgender’. As Sedgwick (1993: 9) notes, these labels still appear ‘as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence’. Furthermore, who counts as ‘queer’ cannot be established *a priori* because the gender and sexual norms that confer coherence and determinacy vary across time and place.

For Judith Butler, the question of who counts as ‘queer’ is a question of who constitutes an intelligible life. There is what Butler (2007: 23-24) refers to as a ‘matrix of intelligibility’ that determines the cultural and historical boundaries of sex/gender. She (2007: 24) writes: “‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire.’ In other words, there are certain normative gender presuppositions to which an individual must conform in order to be ‘intelligibly human’. It is through this notion of intelligibility that I will examine CSS’s (in)ability to account for violence against queer people.

Global violence against queer people

The epidemic of anti-queer violence is a global crisis. Since 2013, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has documented over 100 killings of transgender people within the US, the vast majority of which were trans women of color (McBride, 2017), and globally the HRC reports hundreds of trans murders each year (Thapa, 2016). Case studies from around the world illustrate the global epidemic of anti-queer violence. To name but a few, in 2006 the Inter Press Service released a report on the plight of trans people in Argentina (Valente, 2006); Human Rights Watch (2006) has investigated violence against Nepalese transgender people; Perry and Dyck (2014) have observed the shocking rise in police-reported hate crimes against gays and lesbians in Canada over the past years.

Regrettably, such investigations are far and few between. It is not simply that media coverage is scarce, but that in many parts of the world, investigations into anti-queer violence are not conducted at all. The available evidence is often anecdotal (Witten and Eyler, 1999). Furthermore, the reports that do exist undoubtedly understate the scale of anti-queer violence globally. First, police data on anti-queer violence often does not exist, because hate crime legislation does not recognize gender identity, and only sometimes recognizes sexual orientation, as a protected category (Perry and Dyck, 2014). Second, activists insist that the police is often uninterested in investigating attacks on queer people (Buncombe, 2017) and is still one of the largest perpetrators of anti-queer violence (Stanley, 2011). Third, these statistics underreport anti-queer violence because many queer people are misidentified in police and news reports. For example, the death of India Monroe, a black transgender woman, remained unknown for a month because she was misgendered in the initial police reporting (Adams, 2017). It can take up to months before the police is informed of the correct gender identity of victims (Buncombe, 2017). Finally, Browne et al. (2001) have noted that reporting within a hate-crime framework is limited in the case of anti-queer violence because many queer people ignore abuse as a self-preservation tactic. Queer people often normalize the persistent abuse they experience, meaning that many incidents will never be reported in the first place.

In sum, reports on anti-queer violence confront numerous difficulties due to the specific nature of such violence. Most importantly, the failure to account for queer violence is not primarily due to a lack of media coverage. The problem is not simply invisibility, but also unintelligibility. How can violence be reported when it is perpetrated against individuals that cannot be conceived within dominant regimes of the human, or what Butler refers to as the ‘matrix of intelligibility’? How can a queer life be *represented* when it cannot even be *known* – for example, when ‘it’ cannot be read as either ‘he’ or ‘she’? This article examines the problems that this unintelligibility poses for CSS.

Unintelligibility: Towards an understanding of anti-queer violence

In *Gender Trouble*, the question that preoccupied Butler was: Whose life is deemed real, true, and original, and whose life is considered 'illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate' (Butler, 2007: viii). In *Undoing Gender*, she extends this focus to explore the violence that faces those who fail to 'be known' within normative gender presuppositions. She (2004: 24) asks: 'What is the relation between violence and what is "unreal", between violence and unreality that attends to those who become the victims of violence?' Butler's (2004: 30) response to this question begins with the insight that queer people who transgress gender norms are not only demanding the recognition and protection of their own expressions of gender, but are, more fundamentally, calling into question 'what counts as reality and what counts as a human life'. When the naturalness and given-ness of privileged and habitual presumptions of gender and sexuality are questioned, what occurs is a radical challenge to the ontology of gender and sexual norms.

Anti-queer violence forecloses the conditions of possibility for new gender expressions to come into existence. Or, more accurately, it prevents those expressions that have already existed for a long time to be 'admitted into the terms that govern reality' (Butler, 2004: 31). Violence against queer people is therefore violence against something that is already negated, something that was not 'real' in the first place. And, since it is impossible to negate that which is already negated, violence against queer people is not really violence. As Perry and Dyck (2014: 52) put it, violence is always tied to notions of difference, yet 'difference' implies the recognition of an identity that can be 'Othered'. In the case of unintelligible and derealized life, it cannot be assumed that recognition has occurred.

In sum, violence polices and upholds the norms that render human life intelligible. Because queer lives threaten to undermine or even destroy a social order that is built on the basis of intelligible gender, they are exposed to violence that does not quite count as violence: 'Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark' (Butler, 2004: 25).

It is worth noting that Butler is providing an analytical account of anti-queer violence, not making *empirical* claims about how this violence is most likely to occur or what form it is likely to take. Moreover, there is an analytical difference between violence against queer people and other oppressed groups. Butler (2004: 30) argues that to be unintelligible is 'more fundamental' than being oppressed: 'To be oppressed you must first become intelligible.'

Butler's analysis is a useful lens for reckoning with the difficulties that plague attempts to report anti-queer violence. Taking the notion of unintelligibility seriously and recognizing that anti-queer violence is not perpetrated after the formation of an identity that can be called 'queer', but

rather to negate the very possibility of identity, prompts the questions: How do we count that which cannot be counted? My intention is not to suggest that reporting anti-queer violence is futile. Quite the opposite: The task of such reports is to *realize* that which has been *derealized*, to render *intelligible* that which was *unintelligible*. As such, the reporting of anti-queer violence has the ability to challenge the delegitimization of certain gender and sexual identities.

Explaining absences within Critical Security Studies

Above, I described the difficulties with representing and reporting the global violence against queer people, and then explored both the nature of such violence and the reasons for these difficulties through Butler's notion of 'unintelligibility'. Unfortunately, her theorization of anti-queer violence has not been incorporated into CSS scholarship. In what follows, I explore queer theory within CSS and examine the reasons why CSS does not, and cannot, account for anti-queer violence.

Disciplinary power

It is possible to find queer perspectives within surveillance studies. Drawing extensively on concepts developed in Michel Foucault's writings, including panopticism and disciplinary power, surveillance studies has been a fruitful field of inquiry for critical theorists. Indeed, the first section of *Routledge's Handbook of Surveillance Studies* is an explication of Foucault's writings on disciplinary power and their influence on the field of surveillance studies (Ball et al., 2014). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) argues that disciplinary power is a modern system of power that brings the human body into the realm of politics through practices of surveillance. Political subjects are placed under scrutiny so that they can be categorized, controlled, trained, rendered docile, and optimized for 'economic production and political subjugation' (Vaughan-Williams and Peoples, 2015: 66). For Foucault, the panopticon exemplified this system of power and, in particular, the inculcation of self-discipline.

Foucault's notion of disciplinary power is also central to Butler's analysis of anti-queer violence discussed above. The normative gender presuppositions that, according to Butler, institute and maintain a matrix of intelligibility are enforced through forms of disciplinary power. Queer people are exposed to violence because they fail to modify their gender performances in order to remain inside the set of disciplinary norms that protect from violence. However, there are two limitations of Foucault's concept of disciplinary power in accounting for anti-queer violence. First, Foucault suggested that the techniques of self-discipline and self-regulation would displace the need for overtly coercive, corporeal violence (Spade, 2015: 55). Although postcolonial scholars (e.g., Spivak, 2010; Stoler, 2002) have convincingly challenged this suggestion, writings on disciplinary power continue to place the emphasis on self-regulation rather than on directly coercive forms of

violence. Second, Foucault is more interested in the categories of people that are produced through disciplinary norms than in those people that cannot be categorized. As Butler (1993: 91) points out, Foucault's analysis focuses on the regulation and control that disciplinary power generates; he does not consider the 'exclusions and erasures' that disciplinary norms effect. An account of anti-queer violence would require a shift in emphasis from considering how disciplinary power produces certain identities, to taking into account those possible articulations of identity that disciplinary power forecloses.

It is for these reasons that the scholarship that combines surveillance studies and queer theory does not explore anti-queer violence. In the *Transgender Studies Reader 2*, for instance, Toby Beauchamp (2013) examines the effects of the US government's expansion of surveillance and security policies in the wake of 9/11. He argues that these measures (re)produce normative understandings of sex/gender and increase queer people's chances of becoming suspects, but does not claim that surveillance policies constitute violence against those individuals. Similarly, in *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, Dubrofsky and Magnet (2015) describe the purpose of their edited volume as the illustration of the ways that 'surveillance practices and technologies normalize and maintain whiteness, able-bodiedness, capitalism, and heterosexuality'. The emphasis, once again, is on the discipline and control of certain categories, rather than the ways that disciplinary power impedes the possible articulation of other categories of identity and violently targets those (queer) individuals who are 'uncategorizable'.

Biopolitics, necropolitics, and bare life

The other area within CSS that has incorporated queer theory is the large body of writing on biopolitics – another concept that was developed by Foucault and has since been adopted by queer theorists, poststructuralists, feminist security scholars, international political sociologists, and postcolonial scholars. Foucault argues that biopower is a modern system of power that introduces the population as a category into the political sphere. If disciplinary power operates at the level of the individual, the strategies of biopower target and manage the *population*, a novel political problem (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010: 67). Biopolitics, Foucault (1976: 241) famously stated, is designed to 'make live and let die'.

Biopolitics has become a dominant theoretical framework for understanding violence within CSS. In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that today war has become a 'regime of biopower' – an insight that has been taken up by numerous critical security scholars. For instance, Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero (2008) have identified a 'biopoliticization of security' in the twenty-first century that has been amplified by the 'war on terror', and Dillon and Reid (2009) have examined the biopolitics of liberal war. Recently, there have also been attempts to develop a biopolitical approach to genocide

(Fleming, 2003). The reason that biopower better lends itself to analyses of violence than disciplinary power is that its task is to identify and eradicate those forms of life that endanger 'the population'. Biopower is directly involved in the distribution of life chances amongst population groups (Spade, 2015: 60).

Foucault's notion of biopolitics was foundational to the formulation of two concepts, 'necropolitics' and 'bare life', that critical security scholars have drawn on extensively. Achille Mbembe (2003) developed the concept of 'necropolitics' through his engagement with the racial biopolitics of colonialism. For Mbembe (2003: 40), 'biopolitics' did not capture the reality of certain forms of violent subjugation that created '*death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*'. In the context of the contemporary 'war on terror', Jamie Allinson (2015) speaks of a 'necropolitics of drone warfare', a form of warfare that draws boundaries between lives worthy of protection and lives that must be disposed to ensure the flourishing of the former. Agamben (1998: 6), on the other hand, inquired into the 'hidden point of intersection between juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power'. For Agamben, the state of exception is a space in which the juridico-political order is suspended and in which individuals are reduced to 'bare life' – i.e., life 'that may be killed but not sacrificed' (Agamben, 1998: 83). Biopolitical mechanisms of governance blur the separation of citizen and bare life, so that everyone is potentially exposed to those exceptional practices that remove them from political protection (Vaughan-Williams and Peoples, 2015: 72). Agamben's writings on bare life and the state of exception have been especially influential within risk scholarship (e.g., de Goede, 2008), critical migration studies (e.g., Doty, 2007; Dines et al., 2014), and postcolonial scholarship (e.g. Sylvester, 2006).

Virtually all queer scholarship within CSS has drawn on biopolitical perspectives on global violence. Jasbir Puar's (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages* is an analysis of the ways that LGBT subjects are absorbed into hegemonic structures of the nation-state, a biopolitical practice that redraws the boundaries that determine which forms of life are worthy of protection and which ones are disposable. Puar (2007: 35) interrogates how homonationalist discourses reproduce 'relations of living and dying', a process she refers to as 'queer necropolitics'. Agamben's emphasis on the mutual constitution of the state of exception and the rule of law – 'something is included solely through its exclusion' (Agamben, 1998: 18) – is crucial to her analysis, because it allows her to challenge the dominant assumption that the nation-state is capable of expanding to include all marginalized subjects. Rather, the acceptance and tolerance of certain queer subjects 'entail deferred death or dying' for those life forms that are deemed unworthy of protection (Puar, 2007: 36). *Queer Necropolitics*, a volume edited by Haritaworn et al. (2014: 2), is inspired by Puar's work and sets out

to examine a contemporary necropolitical cleavage: ‘queer subjects invited into life and queerly abjected populations marked for death’.

This literature seems to suggest that CSS can in fact account for violence against queer people. This impression is, however, misleading for at least two reasons. First, it should be noted that use of the word ‘queer’ here is somewhat ambiguous. If ‘queer’ refers to unintelligible forms of life, it is precisely in the moment that a queer person is integrated into hegemonic structures that they *become* intelligible. It is those very structures that produce coherent, stable, and knowable subjects. As Butler (1993: 86) reminds us: ‘Regulation is always generative, producing the object it claims merely to discover.’ Homonationalism describes the process by which certain previously queer subjects are admitted into the norms that govern intelligible life, thereby reproducing a certain way of life to the detriment of others. Second, neither Puar, nor the contributors to *Queer Necropolitics*, consider how homonationalism produces violence against queer people *specifically*. They analyze how the invitation into, and reproduction of, certain life forms marks certain populations out for death. These populations, no doubt, will include queer peoples and will be discursively racialized and queered. But queer necropolitics is not about the violence against queer people themselves. The fact that the acceptance of certain queer subjects comes at the expense of other *queer people* is rather incidental. For example, Sarah Lamble (2014) argues that by supporting hate-crime legislation, LGBT campaigns in the US have bolstered violent systems of incarceration and policing in the US. Here, however, the focus is on the creation and reproduction of violence against certain lives trapped within the carceral system, not specifically on the queer people that exist within that system. To be clear, at no point do these scholars claim that their aim is to account for the violence against queer people *specifically* that is produced through homonationalism. However, I argue that the analytical focus on the queer people that are folded *into* life (and the general populations that are then left to die), rather than those queer people in particular that cannot be absorbed into the nation-state’s structures and are therefore exposed to violence, is due to the limitations of the biopolitical framework for understanding violence – in particular, its inability to grapple with unintelligibility.

The limitations of a Foucauldian approach to violence

In his late writings, Foucault (1976: 242-246) argued that biopower enabled interventions and forms of governance that were aimed at the shared biological properties of the people. In order to ‘administer, optimize, and multiply life’, biopower must subject it ‘to precise controls and comprehensive regulations’ (Foucault, 1978: 137). In other words, the biopolitical monitoring, auditing, and recording of the population produced ‘different fields of knowledge concerned with life’ and introduced life ‘into the order of knowledge and power’ (Foucault, 1978: 142). Foucault’s emphasis on knowledge is crucial – in fact, Volume I of *The History of Sexuality* is subtitled ‘The Will

to Know'. Biopower is fundamentally about rendering certain lives *knowable*, so that they can then be made to live. A biopolitical approach cannot account for violence against those lives that are *unknowable*. Foucault is interested in the categories of life that power *produces* and places at the center of society's political strategies. Queer people, however, are exposed to violence precisely because they are unable to be categorized and because they expose the matrix of intelligibility that is instituted and maintained through the modern systems of power described by Foucault.

'Necropolitics and 'bare life' both also presume a knowable subject. Foucault's conception of racism as an operative form of power is central to the necropolitical logic that divides populations into livable and killable. It creates 'caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower' (Foucault, 1976: 255), thereby permitting and enabling the death of entire populations. To put it differently, racism functions through an 'Othering' process that divides populations. However, this process of 'Othering' implies a recognition of that form of life that threatens the vitality of the protected population. In the case of queer life, recognition does not occur. The inability to be known as a legitimate, real subject means that one's life is neither folded into life nor is one deemed a dangerous form of life. Rather, one is not intelligible as a life in the first place. Queerness does not describe anti-life, but rather calls into question the category of life itself. Eric Stanley (2011: 15) writes that queerness 'is not simply an oppositional category equally embodied by anyone'. Stanley (2011: 13) proposes the notion of 'near life', in the place of Agamben's 'bare life': if 'bare life' refers to 'a kind of stripped-down sociality', then near life names the 'non-existence which comes before the question of life might be posed'. In CSS literature, common examples of populations reduced to 'bare life' include refugees, prisoners of wars, and other forms of life that the sovereign must 'let die' in order to 'make life live'. Agamben (1998: 133) uses refugees from Rwanda as a telling example of 'bare life'. They are photographed and represented in publicity campaigns in order to gather aid. These refugees may be stripped of their ontological status as political subjects, but they are still intelligible as subjects. They can be *recognized* by humanitarian organizations, and 'a life has to be intelligible *as a life*... in order to become recognizable' (Butler, 2009: 6-7).

The challenge of unintelligible life

Where does this leave us? On the one hand, I have shown that violence against queer people has gone un-reported, un-classified, and un-noticed both inside and outside academia. On the other hand, I have suggested that theorizing or reporting violence presupposes an intelligible subject, since one cannot categorize or recognize that which is neither categorizable nor recognizable. It appears, then, that violence against queer people is necessarily untheorizable. Theorizing violence against queer people would entail assigning a specific content to the subject position 'queer', which the very status of the term as a non-identity makes impossible. In this final section, I argue that the challenge

of unintelligible life is not one that must, or can, be definitively overcome. Rather, unintelligibility challenges existing frameworks for understanding violence and spurs us to continuously consider the instability of all identity categories.

As stated above, queer is most usefully understood as a non-identity – as that which points to the unrealizability and indeterminacy of all identity categories. To posit that identity is performative is to claim that it is a doing and a becoming, rather than a being; that it must be ‘perpetually re-established’; and therefore that ‘it risks itself in the very repetition it requires’ (Butler, 2000: 41). For Butler, one is not born a man/woman, nor does one become a man/woman, but rather one is in a continual process of *becoming* a man/woman. The successful naturalization of one’s gender fails because it is ‘manufactured through a sustained set of acts’ (Butler, 2007: xv). This intervention is crucial because it highlights that the subject is neither *pre-discursive*, nor *determined by* discourse. The subject is not prediscursive, but rather is hailed into a particular subject position that is designated by a particular discourse (Hall, 1996). Neither is the subject determined by discourse, because the absolute success of the interpellation into a discursively allotted subject position is impossible. Because identities demand to be continuously performed, the inevitable failure to iterate the identity properly means that identities can never be fixed, stable, or complete. Identity’s inevitable failure to be wholly realized is the condition of possibility for ‘queerness’, since ‘queer’ refers precisely to those gaps and fissures that emerge from within performative signifying practices. In short, the term ‘queer’ points to the impossibility of the ontological completion of any identity category.

The aim of this article is therefore not to propose a better way of reporting anti-queer violence or a more accurate estimation of how much abuse queer people face, which would require the discursive formation of ‘queer’ as a stable identity. Any effort to expand our frameworks so that every subject, including queer subjects, could be included within them will inevitably falter. The queer theoretical and political project brings to the fore the fact that every identity necessarily forecloses the possible articulation of other identities, because for an identity to be rendered intelligible it must draw boundaries between those included in and excluded from the category, boundaries whose contours are shaped by a particular spatial and temporal context. The challenge of unintelligible life, then, is twofold. First, it exposes the impossibility of a coherent, unified, all-inclusive theoretical framework for conceiving violence. Second, it asks that we embrace epistemological uncertainty and perpetually interrogate the exclusions that make any identity category possible. In other words, it demands a continuous, ongoing project that confronts and contests the reification of identity. On the question of violence, it urges us to consider the role that violence itself plays in the reproduction of illusions of stable, natural identities.

Grappling with violence against queer people does not require that we establish 'queer' as a 'third' gender identity, assign subjects to this category within rigid boundaries, and then seek to theorize the violence they face. This project would maintain the fantasy that three identity categories would be more inclusive than two, as if the exclusionary processes of identity formation can be overcome. Indeed, queer scholars have suggested that 'the greater the number of genders the greater their oppressive potential as each may demand the conformity of the individual within increasingly narrower confines' (Agrawal, 1997: 294). More fundamentally, grappling with violence against queer people requires a reconceptualization of violence itself. If within CSS violence is ordinarily understood as a form of harm that is inflicted upon marginalized or vulnerable identity groups, a queer perspective might shift analytical focus towards violence's function in foreclosing the admission of particular subjects into extant identity categories. Taking violence against queer people seriously points critical security scholars towards that dimension of violence which confronts and destroys any threat to the norms that govern reality. Violence, here, is conceptualized as a *(re)productive* force, as that which not only disciplines, controls, and kills subjects, but also naturalizes, maintains, and anchors the norms that determine who will qualify as an intelligible subject.

Conclusion

Critical Security Studies is unable to account for anti-queer violence because frameworks within which understandings of violence are forged presume an intelligible subject of violence. Even Foucault's political thought, often heralded as the origin of queer theory, has difficulties reckoning with violence against queer people since the possibilities of queer subjectivity are foreclosed through the productive effects of power.

This article is a call for critical IR scholars to take the challenge of 'unintelligibility' seriously. Feminist security scholars have already directed their attention to those subjects unable to 'speak security' and to those bodily performances that constitute a form of speech (Hansen, 2000), but they have not been attentive to those bodies that are not coherent or intelligible in the first place and what this means for their ability to become subjects worthy of protection from violence.

I have argued that it is impossible to develop a theoretical framework to account for violence against queer people. Indeed, the very term 'queer' undoes the possibility of a unified and coherent theoretical system. However, this is not a nihilistic admission of defeat. Rather, taking the untheorizability of 'queer' – by which I mean the impossibility of determining a stable, completed queer subject that can become the object of systematic study – seriously can substantially enrich CSS scholarship in at least two ways. Firstly, it requires scholars to continuously resist the essentialization of identity categories (whether they are theorizing violence against 'refugees', 'women', 'children', or 'war prisoners') and to make visible the exclusionary processes through which those very identities

are constituted. Secondly, it would prompt scholars to theorize violence's role in the (re)production of identity categories, indeed of the social order more generally.

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