Collective Discussion: Violence as a Boundary Object: Implications for the Field of International Political Sociology

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Violence is an enduring global challenge: it can occur in the context of interpersonal relationships, as well as interstate and intercommunal conflict. The synchronous focus on the global and the social in international political sociology might naturally transcend some paradigmatic divisions over what constitutes violence and at which level of analysis it might be studied. However, there has been little analysis of the complex concept of violence and how it functions at the intersection of international relations, sociology, and politics as well as other disciplines represented here by journalism and health. This collective discussion follows from a series of roundtables, which situated violence as a "boundary object": objects that are "plastic" enough to exist across different disciplines and languages, but "robust" enough to maintain a common identity (Star and Griesemer). The roundtables were built around three themes, replicated below, to interrogate, test, and push the boundaries of plasticity and robustness on the concept of violence across disciplines. The conversation that emerged is presented in this collective discussion as a conversation, with representation of divergent positions and the thought processes they inspired.

La violence constitue un défi persistant au niveau mondial : elle peut intervenir dans le cadre de relations interpersonnelles, aussi bien que dans des conflits entre les États ou communautés. La focalisation synchrone sur le mondial et le social en sociologie politique internationale pourrait naturellement transcender certaines divisions paradigmatiques s'agissant de ce qui constitue de la violence et le niveau d'analyse auquel elle peut être étudiée. Néanmoins, il n'existe que peu d'analyses du concept complexe de violence et de son fonctionnement à l'intersection des relations internationales, de la sociologie et de la politique, ainsi que d'autres disciplines représentées ici par le journalisme et la santé. Cette discussion collective fait suite à une série de tables rondes, qui ont situé la violence comme un ≪ objet-frontière ≫ : des objets suffisamment ≪ plastiques ≫ pour exister dans différentes disciplines et langues, tout en étant suffisamment

≪ robustes ≫ pour maintenir une identité commune (Star et Griesemer, 1989 : p. 393). Les tables rondes ont été pensées autour de trois thèmes, répliqués ci-dessous, pour interroger, tester et repousser les limites de la plasticité et de la robustesse du concept de violence dans les différentes disciplines. La conversation apparue est présentée dans cette discussion collective comme une conversation, en représentant les positions divergentes et les cheminements qu'elles ont inspirés.

La violencia representa un desafío global duradero ya que puede ocurrir en el contexto de las relaciones interpersonales, así como en conflictos interestatales e intercomunitarios. El enfoque sincrónico en lo global y en lo social de la sociología política internacional podría trascender de forma natural a algunas de las divisiones paradigmáticas con relación a qué constituye violencia y en qué nivel de análisis esta podría ser estudiada. Sin embargo, se han llevado a cabo pocos análisis con respecto al complejo concepto de violencia y a cómo este funciona en la intersección de las relaciones internacionales, la sociología y la política, así como de otras disciplinas, representadas aquí por el periodismo y la salud. Este debate colectivo surge de una serie de mesas redondas, que situaron la violencia como un ≪objeto fronterizo≫, es decir, un objeto que tiene la suficiente ≪plasticidad≫ para existir a través de diferentes disciplinas y lenguajes, pero también lo suficientemente ≪robusto≫ para mantener una identidad común (Star y Griesemer, 1989: p.393). Las mesas redondas se constituyeron en torno a tres temas, replicados a continuación, con el fin de cuestionar, probar y expandir las fronteras de la plasticidad y la robustez del concepto de violencia a través de las disciplinas. La conversación que surgió de ellas se presenta en este debate colectivo como una conversación en la que están representadas posiciones divergentes, así como los procesos de pensamiento que estas inspiraron.

Introduction

Violence is an enduring global challenge: it can occur in the context of interpersonal relationships, as well as interstate and intercommunal conflict. The synchronous focus on the global/local and the social/political in international political sociology might naturally transcend some paradigmatic divisions over what constitutes violence and at what level of analysis it might be studied. Yet, despite the ever-present nature of violence in the world, there has been little analysis of the complexity of the concept of violence itself and how it functions at the intersection of international relations, sociology, and politics as well as other disciplines, represented here by journalism and health.

The study of violence is core to the study of International Relations (IR); for example, the analysis of war and conflict underscoring the history of IR (see Dunne, Cox, and Booth 1998), is positioned as a direct response to both internal and international state violence in the constitution of the contemporary international system of states (Weiss 2015) . References to physical, interpersonal violence are most common in critical scholarship and international political sociology, where the legitimacy of the state's use of violence is interrogated, and violence is positioned as a contested or contestable concept that is not limited to the physical but can incorporate threat and coercion. Here, we seek to explore where IR and IPS can benefit from, and have benefitted from, interdisciplinary work that centres interpersonal violence and/or human and social experiences of violence.

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Sociology as a discipline has dealt with violence more directly that IR, albeit only recently. Over the last decade, as part of a new sociology of violence (Walby 2013; Kilby and Ray 2014), scholars have made targeted efforts to engage with violence as central to the discipline, rather than subsumed within other structures. This shift recognises that violence is not reducible to other forms or institutions of power, such as the state, economy, or culture, nor is it just an extension of them. Rather, violence is a complex problem that is interconnected in sometimes unpredictable ways (Adisa and Bond 2024).

Our entry point, then, is to consider whether working across academic disciplines can better account for this complexity. In order to do this, we ask not simply what violence is, but how violence comes to be known at all. We examine the conditions that shape how violence becomes intelligible within and across disciplines, and how these conditions are shaped by power that is operational in academic disciplines, and in the world. Violence in the world, whilst present in our discussions as a referent, is not our main focus; rather, the relationship between violence in the world and violence in the academy emerged as the central problematic shaping our discussion.

We expose this problematic through the boundary object concept as an *epistemological heuristic*. Critical feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial approaches have all done vital work contesting whose violences count and whose definitions prevail, and interdisciplinary approaches have sought shared frameworks or convergence. Here, the boundary object heuristic asks how a shared conversation about violence becomes possible: what relational processes enable that encounter, whose terms govern the translation, and what the costs of translation are in terms of what can and cannot be known. We shift attention from violence as a thing that disciplines variously define, to violence as a boundary object traversing the relational processes that make certain violences legible and foreclose others. The unattended violences (e.g., those that emerge too slowly to be seen, those that do not survive translation, that resist dominant vocabularies of legibility, or that are foreclosed rather than simply marginalised) are not gaps in knowledge to be filled, but are structural features of how knowledge about violence is produced that can be made visible by the boundary object heuristic.

Excavating the study of violence as a social phenomenon in IR and expanding the sociological concept of violence through interdisciplinary study form the broad basis of this collective discussion. The article follows from a series of roundtables funded by the VISION: Violence, Health, and Society project and held at City St George's University of London in the Spring of 2024. The series situated violence as a "boundary object": objects that are "plastic" enough to exist across different disciplines and languages, but "robust" enough to maintain a common identity (Star and Griesemer 1989:393). The roundtables brought experts on violence together in an interdisciplinary space and were built around three themes: violence as a boundary object; the challenges of working across boundary "zones"; and what our practice might look like when navigating these boundaries in the study of violence. This article replicates these themes in structure. Through this discussion, we show that approaching violence as a boundary object reveals three things that other frameworks do not bring into view simultaneously: the relational processes through which a shared conversation about violence becomes possible across disciplines; the costs of translational processes that foreclose some violences, or render others invisible; and the ways in which the researcher is always already inside those processes, implicated in the violence they seek to study rather than observing it from outside. These are not conclusions about violence itself, but about the conditions of its knowing.

This collective discussion seeks to expose these conditions as well as the role of emotional honesty and relational reflexivity that attending to them requires. In fact, the discussion itself is an enactment of the epistemological work the boundary object heuristic generates. It proceeds in three parts: part 1 presents violence as a boundary object from different disciplinary perspectives, part 2 considers and stages

some challenges of working with violence, and part 3 reflects on what good practice might look like, working with violence as a boundary object. Ultimately, the discussion demonstrates that working with violence as a boundary object means learning to be productive within and through the irreconcilable.

Theme 1: Violence as a Boundary Object

The concept of a "boundary object" was coined byr (Star 1989) and developed further with Griesemer (1989: 393) to describe "scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds. . .*and* satisfy the informational requirements of each of them." They are objects which are malleable to local need but maintain some common identity: i.e., they are objects that are "weakly structured in common use" but "common *enough* to more than one world to make them recognizable" (*ibid:* 393; emphasis added). Actors in different social worlds are involved in translating, negotiating, and interpreting objects that are likely to have different meanings for each of them. Ironically, while the term "boundary" assumes an edge or border to an area, "boundary object" was "used to mean a shared space" of action (Star 2010 : 602–603). By engaging violence as a "boundary object" (e.g., Star and Griesemer, 1989; see also, regarding femicide Vega 2023), we can acknowledge violence as an entity that can exist across different "epistemic worlds" (Cetina 2009; see also Hester 2011); that may share some recognizable elements, but are likely to represent and hold different meanings to different social actors. Framing violence in this way prompts the question of how different disciplines act *with* or *toward* it as an object, and most importantly of the conditions and costs of travel across different epistemic worlds.

We use the lens of boundary objects in this discussion, not as a *concept of* "violence" in itself, but as a heuristic device that attends to the conditions that allow violence (as a concept) to travel across disciplinary boundaries. Doing so, we are not required to first reconcile competing understandings of violence or zoom in on shared elements for the discussion to emerge. Attention is directed to the relational processes of translation through which violence is made legible in different epistemic worlds: whose terms govern those translations, what is made visible in the crossing, and what violences do not survive it. In doing so, we can situate and acknowledge violence as possibly simultaneously occurring in *physical* and *non-physical* acts, in the "material" and "discursive" (Hearn et al. 2022a), in different *forms* (e.g., sexual assault or emotional abuse), of different levels of analysis (e.g., micro, meso, and macro), or across multiple actors (e.g., individuals, groups, state, and transnational bodies) including within various disciplines. This approach captures the sometimes-contradictory ways that "violence" is understood by different disciplines, or by different paradigms or subfields within disciplines, without necessarily seeking to reconcile them. In this section, we introduce our respective discipline's approaches to the concept of violence, with particular attention to their emerging (a)synchronies.

Alexandria

It is worth noting the body of work in IR that acknowledges borders and bordering processes before embarking on a discussion of a boundary object. Much like violence, borders have always been simultaneously fundamental and implicit in IR scholarship, particularly in work that adopts the nation–state as the unitary actor and agent of international politics. As work on borders and bordering grew in critical geography, insights adopted in IR and IPS found that bordering practices were not and are not confined to physical borders (Vaughn-Williams 2016; Yuval-Davis 2019). Bordering is not just about preserving the sovereign state, but also the types of inequality that are crucial to the patriarchal, white supremacist, Western-centric state's continued existence (Agius and Edenborg 2019;). Experiences of violence are one of and a consequence of these inequalities.

Bordering work has conceptually contributed to (and drawn from) feminist and postcolonial IR (e.g., Sylvester 2002; Chowdhry and Nair 2002; Kinnvall 2016; Woons and Weier 2017), and migration studies and border studies in IR (e.g., Parker and Amoore 2006; Vaughn-Williams et al 2016). Nevertheless, the boundary object makes a perspectival shift: rather than looking at the instrumentalization, function and effect of borders, the boundary object looks at how a shared object of analysis travels these borders and what the conditions and costs of that travel reveal about the limits of what any one discipline can know about, in this case, violence.

Engaging violence through the lens of a boundary object creates space for conceptual and definitional questions to draw from across disciplines and offer new insight. To be clear, violence saturates the study of IR, which traditionally has been dominated by the study of war, conflict, and security. Critical scholarship has noted that "bodily violence and vulnerability, as the flipside of security, are largely ignored" (Wilcox 2015: 2). IR is not a cohesive discipline and across subfields and studies, there is great variation in terms of the approach to violence taken, the conceptualisation of violence adopted, and the subject matter at stake. Feminist IR, for example, has dealt with specific types of violence, such violence against women and gender-based violence (True 2014; Wilcox 2015), and also added a feminist perspective to existing concepts and framings of political and military violence (Sjoberg 2016, Tickner 2004; Zalewski and Runyan 2013; Kirby 2013). Critical security studies has variously named and interrogated violence (Aradau 2012, 2018; Moffette and Vadasaria 2016) and post-colonial and decolonial IR have engaged necessarily with the concept of violence (Vernon 2022 , Cash and Kinnvall 2017), including epistemic violence (Van Milders and Toros 2020; Boersma 2022; Brunner 2021). Recognizing this varied engagement, it seems surprising that violence is not more frequently explicitly foregrounded as the substance of IR. Violence is a key unifying characteristic of studies. Situating violence at the boundaries of disciplines (IR, sociology, health, media studies, criminology, and law) but also at the boundary between theory and practice in IR may raise more questions than it answers, but raising those questions offers a *centring* of violence as a common object of study for IR *in general*.

Elizabeth

One could argue that there are reasons to be optimistic about the ways that sociology has started to engage with violence and the lessons that can be learned for International Political Sociology. Many have pointed out that, historically, sociological theory has *not* had a strong track record of theorising violence, particularly should we only measure this according to the "hegemony of 'anti-militarist' social theory" of post-war sociology as Malešević (Malešević 2010: 194) argues (i.e., Durkheim, Marx, Weber). *Why* sociology, IR, and many other disciplines have sought to skirt around the concept of violence, to employ euphemisms, or reduce to overlapping though ultimately different social phenomena requires much further reflection and analysis. This seems particularly significant given that naming an act as violence has political implications. The emergence of sociologies of violence in the past decade promises to grapple more directly in theorising violence as intersecting with other domains of power (e.g., Walby 2013) or as a domain of power in its own right (Hearn et al. 2022a). However, it is precisely this interconnectedness that compels more innovative ways of making sense of violence and, ultimately, "takes sociology to its limits" (Kilby and Ray 2014 : 2). In this way, working in an interdisciplinary way seems less "if" but "how." Thinking about violence as a boundary object then, can be a way of answer the "how" question.

Sociology, and in extension International Political Sociology, has plenty to learn from interdisciplinarity not only in an empirical and methodological sense, but in a *reflective* sense where we can start to unsettle some of the assumptions and traditions of mainstream sociological research (Embrick 2023). At the core of these efforts are

issues around visibility, silence and discounting of certain forms of violence. So far, the various ways that disciplines frame and measure violence have created fragmentation. For example, as Hearn et al. (2022a: 686) point out, violence between states predominantly being the interest of political science, violence within states being the interest of sociology, and violence between individuals being that of criminology and psychology. Instead, they offer the concept of "violence regimes" as an opportunity to capture "both the production of violence and wider material-discursive politics of violence" (Hearn et al. 2022a: 696): that is, recognizing how the knowledge we generate (and the voices they represent) fold back into the "production and reproduction of violence" (Hearn et al. 2022b: 574). Therefore, one of the key questions that interdisciplinarity presents is how to be more inclusive of perspectives that have so far been marginalized but have long histories of critical thought and resistance against violence, including feminist movements, experiences of minoritized women, and perspectives from the Global South (Abraham and Purkayastha 2012; see also Koen below). The hope is, if done well, working across boundaries within and across disciplines can move us forward, rather than just sideways. In this way, violence as a concept does "boundary work" as it operates through multiple dimensions (space, identity), scales (State, organisational, and individual), and mediums that require negotiation between social actors and systems. It allows for new conversations and offers a framework for a shared understanding across ontological and epistemological divides.

Laura

I take the earlier point about IR's implicit or explicit problems naming violence, even as the discipline studies things that are violence in different terms, often reserving the terminology of violence for those violences understood as extra-legal, and sanitizing international-system normalized violence with words less messy than "violence." I think these tendencies limit the breadth (as Koen usefully discusses below), the depth, and the frankness with which violence is discussed, especially in more traditional IR scholarship but even in critical scholarship. When I say that I think IR is limited in the depth and frankness of how it treats violence, I mean that the term is used (when IR scholars even manage to use it) in place of more explicit descriptors of the truly awful things that happen in the world. In my research, I have used terms like "war and conflict" Gentry and Sjoberg 2015), "extra-legal violence" (Sjoberg and Peet 2019), and "intentional civilian victimization" (Sjoberg 2009)—phrases that acknowledge violence while obscuring the horrors they really describe. This is not unique to my work, though—most IR scholarship uses these terms, which are at once vague and appear neutral in normative direction. Yet as I write *there is a genocide in Palestine*—which in my view cannot be called violence or war or conflict with any terminological accuracy (see Sultany 2024). I cannot begin to understand that genocide without understanding the global political arena as a manifestation of the practice of (cisheterosexist racist) necropolitics (Mbembe 2003; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Piscopo 2014)—where the terms "sovereignty" and "power" are stand-ins for assigning differential value to human life and deciding who lives and who dies. The study of global politics is not the study of war or conflict—it is the study of how people who kill decide who dies and then distribute that death. "Violence" (lethal and not) is a tool of distribution of killability (Mbembe 2003, 2023) and of death. This approach suggests two things: that a broad understanding of violence (as discussed by Koen below) is normatively and intellectually necessary, and that there is a moral imperative not only to recognizing violence across its forms but to naming and discussing it explicitly. Without that work (or even with it), the discipline is nowhere near reckoning with the horrors of violence in the world as such, much less our own personal complicity in and commission of many of those horrors.

Jana

One of the many challenges in conceptualizing interpersonal violence lies in the complex entanglement between the personal and the structural facts of violence and systems of oppression and control (Hearn et al. 2022b). To productively grapple with the ambivalent relationship between agency and structure, the micro and the macro, and the local and the transnational in this context calls for more innovative ways to engage with the subject, as Elizabeth highlighted, and I would add more collaborative ways. Global and interdisciplinary efforts to eliminate violence against women also illustrate some of the paradigmatic tensions within the social sciences.

For decades, intimate partner violence against women was problematically referred to as battering of wives and women in US-American literature (Dobash 1979; Erez et al. 2009), which reinforces the heteronormative image of individual(ised) victimization through primarily physical abuse. Today, violence against women tends to be used synonymously, or in combination, with more sterile vocabulary (Boyle 2018). Umbrella terms such as domestic violence and abuse or gender-based violence, followed by a growing appendix of subforms, have been successfully institutionalized at an international level. Paradoxically, in shifting to a more neutral and supposedly more inclusive terminology, there is a risk of (again) losing track of the systemic patterns through which gendered violence operates intersectionally. This shift opens space for complex acts of violence to be depoliticized, excluded, and instrumentalized. We can see the real-world repercussions of this dilemma that are relevant in the context of International Political Sociology as a research paradigm: for example, if femonationalist agendas pledge to *protect* women from racialized immigrant men's violence with racist immigration policies (Farris 2017) or the weaponization of borders against women with temporary migration status (Segrave 2021). Thus, the ways in which we conceptualize violence can not only hinder meaningful social change but, at worst, also perpetuate further harm.

Hence, we need to (re-)connect the study of violence more closely to the ontological realities and often marginalised perspectives, as Olumide and Elizabeth argue below. This is afforded by existing work on bordering that has intersected with IR and political sociology (Rumford 2006; Yuval-Davis et al 2019). The value of the boundary object in this context is in its ability to travel and transgress borders, precisely because it avoids being ontologically embedded in any tradition. Only by carefully linking the seemingly fragmented constructs and specialized definitions of violence can we simultaneously reconstruct their functions in maintaining a socio-political order. Thus, without necessarily operating with a shared definition of what violence is, means, or does—within and across disciplines and sectors—conversations like these could strengthen an interdisciplinary understanding beyond the limitations we all seem to face.

Koen

I agree with Jana, considering violence as a boundary object has important benefits, and has the potential to bring new perspectives and disciplines to IR, creating new conceptual spaces. Of course, such work would build on critical IR scholars (from decolonial, feminist, queer, and other traditions) important attempts to refocus the analysis on those issues that have been falling through the cracks of IR's disciplinary boundaries, by bringing into focus those who remain unrecognized as "agents" and "theorists" of IR. Such attempts, of course, have received varying responses from the mainstream IR discipline ranging from co-optation to sidelining. It is in these responses that violence as a boundary object has an additional contribution to make, beyond the ability of creating a shared space (as discussed above).

By engaging and thinking about how "violence" as a concept also acts as a boundary object that transgresses the boundaries, we can examine violence in the world,

but also turn our gaze to the boundaries that the concept transgresses and how violence is necessary (as an act or structure) to maintain the boundaries that we are seeking to permeate. We must remain attentive that boundary objects are not neutral and passive, but in turn create and maintain hegemonies and articulate power (Huvila 2011), and thus can produce violence themselves.

My point here is that how we know violence, what we can say about violence, and the words we use are not only defined by politics and power, but also by the disciplinary lenses we employ to examine our world, and as such, we must consider violence at its multiple levels, including in the spaces from which we come to talk about violence. To consider violence a boundary object, we must also reckon with the boundary structures of IR itself and the *disciplining power of disciplines*. How does the violence of disciplinarity and of the discipline of IR itself shape what can and cannot be named (Van Milders and Toros 2020), who is welcome at the table and who is not, and whose voice can be heard and who is silenced. Such disciplinary boundary work manifests not only through epistemic hierarchies that privilege certain ways of knowing (Brunner 2021; Hutchings and Owens 2021), but also through interpersonal exclusions that signal who belongs and whose speech is marked as deviant (Niemann, Gutiérrez y Muhs, and Gonzalez 2020; Zvobgo et al. 2023; Hagen and Ranawana 2024). These microaggressions we experience as marginalised scholars are reflections of the bigger structures that shape our understanding and engagement with, for example, gendered, racialized, and queer violence in the world, but also of the violence of the real world. The wave of anti-gender and anti-LGBT violence that is on the rise globally is a case in point. This violence does not only occur through the normalisation of everyday violence against trans and queer people, but it also enters the ways in which queer and anti-racist "demands for respect and human dignity" are reframed as violent attacks on the freedoms of the majority (through weaponised victimhood). Those working to spotlight the violence of gender regimes and cis-heteronormativity in the world and in the academy are increasingly vilified through targeted attacks against disciplines that seek to expose worldly power and violence (see the attacks on gender studies and critical race theory by populist regimes).

For me, this means that engaging violence as a boundary object demands that we confront not only violence in world politics but also the violence that structure our disciplines. Doing so is both an analytic and political project, it is a call to undiscipline IR (Bleiker 2023) and to transform the conditions that make violence legible. This call to undiscipline is an insistence on transforming the disciplinary architectures that determine, which violences can be known, named, or made to matter, but also one to recognize that very act of questioning the place of embodied violences experienced by the researcher themselves within the discipline as a tool of power that keeps invisible structural forms of violence.

Olumide

Violence should be viewed as a fluid and complex concept that requires a deeper and dynamic understanding of the relationship between structural inequalities and violence (Stanko 2003 : 3). There is a thread-like consensus among the comments made by Alexandria, Koen, Elizabeth, and Laura, that violence is troubling and complex, complicating efforts to challenge dominant narratives and to speak back against the imposition of such knowledge production processes and concepts. Koen points out the epistemic injustice present in many social science disciplines, including IR. However, the assumption of fixed boundaries of separateness among the perceived powerful and powerless groups persists, limiting our understanding of unspoken and unrepresented violence.

The ongoing "decolonial project" tells one that the radical shifting of hegemonic power structures offers a chance to enhance one's ability to question preconceived

notions about violence, allowing for feedback looping in a matrix of power, blurring boundaries. This type of complexity brings unpredictability with it. The unpredictability of violence suggests a need for complex understandings and rethinking of knowledge. Elizabeth rightly notes that the effectiveness of sociology in advancing interdisciplinary approaches and complexity is still debated, in line with similar arguments made by social theorists like Walby (2013), Ray (2017), and Hartman 2017 , who argue that violence is undertheorized and requires more focus within sociology.

Theoretically, fragile stability is also possibile when space is given to unrepresented violence. Nixon's concept of "slow violence," which emerged from environmental field is a good example of a potential opportunity for improving theorising on violence complexity to transcend fixed boundaries of the social and global. Slow violence, which refers to gradual, often unnoticed destruction that unfolds over time and is generally not regarded as violence. This notion contrasts with the immediate and spectacular forms of violence (Nixon, quoted in Darling 2022, : 33–34) typically recognized in criminology, sociology, and IPS. Furthermore, slow violence manifests in the lived experiences of ontological violence, where alternative perspectives and alterities are suppressed and rendered invisible. Historical systemic invisibility of marginalized knowledge continues to stifle hopeful encounters for systemic change (Kumari and Adisa 2024). This form of violence is often overlooked in research processes and represents a challenge for interdisciplinary efforts. It is here that thinking about violence as a boundary object provides an avenue to pay more attention to these slow violences, especially because it requires us to also consider the translation process that emerges when seek to talk about violence from different ontological and epistemological positions.

Theme 2: Challenges of Working across "Boundary Zones"

Our initial discussions confirmed what the boundary object heuristic would lead us to expect that the process of translating violence across disciplinary boundaries is neither straightforward nor cost-free. Violence is an *essentially contested concept,* and its boundaries are not dictated by academic discipline, although they can guide the use and engagement with the concept. To those working with the concept, this conclusion is not surprising. But what we aim to achieve by considering *violence* as a boundary object is not to reinscribe a common understanding of violence or erase its contested nature, but rather emphasize the process of negotiation. The word "object" here should not be taken as a move to making violence a "thing," but rather as the kaleidoscope that makes visible the different processes that are at play when we discuss violence. It is a heuristic that helps to reorient our analysis at multiple junctures (Oswick and Robertson 2009), for example, what we ask, what we count as evidence, how we overcome distinctions, how we understand the relationship between how we name and understand violence and its real-world experience? We thus become interested in the productive process of translation that shapes our understanding and experience of violence.

Such focus is not easy and requires a lot of emotional and intellectual labor. The second roundtable confirmed this as, through discussing how violence features in our research, multiple tensions emerged in the room. Each coming from our own disciplines, we brought in a variety of expectations, assumptions, and practices that shaped how we engaged with one another and it exposed fault lines that were not easily overcome. Whilst perhaps naively we considered that we all had a shared interest in violence (as a boundary object that connected us), we did not necessarily expect the challenges that emerged by stepping out our own silos, and seeking to bridge our different engagements, language, and ontological and epistemological assumptions. What violence can be seen and by whom has been shaped by our disciplinary boundaries. The dynamics we experienced were reminiscent of Taussig's

(Taussig 1989) notion of a "public secret." We all know violence is everywhere and that it structures (our) lives, but addressing it head-on seems too destabilising. We needed to approach it sideways, shift our focus to make it somewhat legible. In discussing violence as a boundary object, we found ourselves speaking around violence, focusing on the boundary zones themselves in an attempt to come to violence indirectly.

In doing this, some of us turned to our own experiences of violence in the world and translated them to how this violence is felt within the academy, as the shared (yet partial) common denominator in the room. This move does not imply the primacy of the academy as a site of violence; rather, it served as a translation device for crossing epistemic boundaries. Doing so, for example, allowed us to discuss how we can shift between understandings of violence as acts, or as systemic or slow. Yet, this produced new tensions in the form of collapsing our discussion inwards and losing sight of the violences we initially aimed to discuss. We invite the reader to treat this unresolved tension as analytically instructive of the value of using boundary object as a heuristic device. The discussion below illustrates where, for example, processes of translation are productive sites that allow for ways of engaging previously unavailable, but in doing so always make some violences visible while silencing others. We can see how the boundary object device directs attention to the very practices through which violence is named for different audiences, and how these practices themselves can reproduce violence, including by foreclosing the violences that do not survive the translation into shared legibility.

To see this at work in the real world, consider the following: During our discussions, Lindsey discussed how the news cycle shapes the way violence can become intelligible. Indeed, the dominance of episodic rather than thematic reporting (Iyengar 2009) produces journalism that too often lacks contextualisation and at its worst perpetuates violence. The notion that making violence visible always leads to interventions and responsiveness have been challenged by recent events in Gaza, and in the scholarly work of, for example, Zelizer (2023: 1385), who argued that "mediated visibility can be partial or complete, spectacular or normalized, official or vernacular, delayed or immediate"—thereby shaping how one responds to what has been made visible. And whilst some disciplines like journalism thrive off violence—in that violence remains central to determine newsworthiness—not all violence is equal. Violence that suits the powerful is embraced, whilst taboo and so-called sensitive topics and associated violences, such as sexual violence (or even genocide), often become tempered and softened to make them more palatable. Relatedly, Gene reminds us that within epidemiology, violence was largely invisible until the last quarter of the 20th century. The gaze of public health then broadened (Dahlberg and Mercy 2009) to include violence as a problem, an "exposure" in epidemiological terms that damages health in the short and long term. The US Centre for Diseases Control established a violence epidemiology branch in 1983, funding primary research on incidence and health impacts, then shifting in the 1990s to research on public health interventions to reduce violence, including randomized controlled trials. The positioning of violence within a public health paradigm is synchronous with that paradigm's embracing structural factors in disease aetiology (Sommer and Parker 2013), including mediators of behavior linked to physical and mental health.

This conceptualization of violence brings it into the boundary between health and social sciences, but also between research and praxis given that the social-ecological model is ubiquitous across public health policy to prevent violence, articulating factors and interactions at the individual, relationship/family, community, and society levels that increase or reduce the risk of violence. Early applications included those in relation to violence against women (Heise 1998); it has been applied to different forms of violence and further developed to incorporate globalization theories (Fulu and Miedema 2015). Epidemiology, still the core discipline of public

health, has started its engagement with other disciplines to understand the impact of violence on health and the potential for prevention and mitigation of violence, although there is still an "epistemic arrogance" about the validity of measurement and statistical analysis over qualitative methods.

These two reflections on the place of violence in two quite different disciplines show the underlying questions we had to grapple with, sparking a discussion asking how violence is made legible? How do we see violence and how do we make each other see different violences that would have gone unnoticed otherwise? Whilst IPS already engages some of these questions, often more implicitly, the notion of the boundary object brings these questions to the foreground.

Olumide

While discussing boundary zones, it's important to recognize that emergent power (by this I mean, collective capacities for change to overhaul knowledge production ecosystems) can clarify our capacity for action against systems of oppression. I find the term "boundary zones" problematic because it conjures up fixed and separate categories. Instead, we should view boundary work as dynamic and fluid, allowing different types of knowledge to emerge, particularly in understanding violence (see also Brambilla and Jones 2019).

The fluid and changing nature of violence indicates that there is no single theory or solution for addressing it. This complexity suggests that we must create knowledge and work toward healing as we confront challenges across various disciplines within a complicated academic (and policy) environment, which can sometimes present as an empowerment/responsibilization dilemma. Institutional issues such as funding, racism, and gender equity issues can further limit our thinking by promoting and rewarding siloed approaches entrenched in erasure/denial/silencing practices.

Reimagining approaches to recognize emergent power could lessen the challenges of entrenched power in boundary practices and foster a focus on interconnectedness. To offer up some examples in IR/IPS, Claudia Brunner's (Claudia Brunner 2021) decolonial approach in International Relations proposes new methods for analysis and highlights the influence of knowledge production, embodying a promising interdisciplinary perspective. Catherine Craven's (2018) advocacy for assemblage theory in analyzing global diaspora engagement is interesting. The work of Hirmer and Istratii (n.d) in *Decolonial Subversions* to challenge Western epistemic and ontological hegemony is also very promising.

Alexandria

Politically, I am all for border abolition. But I wonder if it is worth considering where boundaries are protective as we reflect on the challenges of working *across* boundary zones. Returning to Koen's points above about the violence of disciplining, it seems that *protective* spaces emerge where non-dominant voices can push theory and knowledge before raising a collective challenge to the "centre" that crosses the boundary zone. This is a "siloing" outcome, but is also the result of a power differential. Thus enters the "politics" of an international political sociology of violence. Laura referenced the genocide in Gaza above. For many, just naming genocide in Gaza is a political act, and we see the politics of naming and protesting violence in this case play out and further test the definitional limits of violence. Consider the dozens of US-based professors who have lost jobs and even faced criminal charges for participating in pro-Palestine on-campus protests (Quinn 2024) or the arrests of peaceful protesters in the UK, demonstrating their support for proscribed organization Palestine Action (Faulkner 2025). Naming genocide in Gaza is a political act that acknowledges violence and produces violence. Other political violence has

not been as central to public discourse, such as in Sudan (Dominguez et al. 2025), nor have named genocides generated sustained political direct action in Western states, such as the Yazidis, Rohingya, or Uyghur. This is perhaps in part because the chains of complicity of Western governments, while present, are not as visible. Yet, attending to violence is not zero-sum. Rather, making *any* violence visible can refocus academic and public discourse away from geopolitical strategy and toward harms experienced by people as a consequence of power politics.

While I agree with Olumide that boundary zones can give a connotation of a static closed space, I wonder if an unbounded discipline would return by default to a landscape similar to the "great debates" of IR, with winners and losers, privileging the powerful and re-silencing the voices of those, as Koen described, "who look different from the mainstream of IR and those that speak from outside the normative structures that make up IR and (western) society as a whole." These voices have flourished in the protective subfield spaces of a more pluralized IR landscape (Dunne et al 2013). Reactionary forces suppressing the *academic* discussion of genocide in Gaza suggest that the effects of inequality in the discipline are cause for real concern (Sultany 2024; Fúnez-Flores 2024). Therefore, I pose the question, can the value of protective spaces, perhaps the caution afforded by working in boundary zones, as well as the collective voice generated across disciplines in shared interdisciplinary subfields, be considered an advantage to overcome epistemic arrogance or disciplinary violence?

Laura

It seems odd to me to be talking about "boundary zones" and "borders" *in the discipline* and *in the world* in the same set of conversations. In both contexts, borders are many things, but instantiations of power and practices of violence are chief among them. "In the world," border zones mean completely different things based on power, privilege, and whiteness. "In the world," those who *can* "protect*"* their border zones (even or at the expense of others') *do*, and border zones are sites of necropolitics. "In the world," working across border zones is often ethically fraught, physically dangerous, imbued with power, and incredibly messy. And "in the world," *choosing* to work in border zones is a choice of privilege, where many people in the world *must* work in, navigate, and try to survive border zones. In that sense, I feel somewhat uncomfortable using the same language of borders and boundary zones about lives "in the world" and about disciplinary sociology and politics—which, while deeply normatively problematic, power-laden, and violent, and while it *does* have implications "in the world" is much smaller stakes than the horrors of boundary zones "in the world."

Thinking about the discipline in whatever language, though, it is important to think about the relationship between (disciplinary) power and maps of the field. Often, those who have disciplinary (and disciplining) power either intentionally gatekeep to exclude people who think differently or ignore others' gatekeeping. Those who see, feel, and experience the boundaries of the field are often those with less power—early career researchers, people with precarious contracts, or people experimenting with unconventional methods or ideas unfamiliar or uncomfortable to the mainstream/malestream of the field. This is not incidental but structural in the discipline. The structures of the discipline perpetuate themselves in many ways—institutional privilege, class privilege, white privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege, and national origin privilege are few among many.

I do not know at the end of the day whether the disciplinary "boundary zone" work I have done, either between feminist work and the mainstream of the field (Sjoberg 2009) or between quantitative methods and interpretivist scholarship (Barkin and Sjoberg 2017), is either normatively net positive or impactful on the field. I *do* know that I did that work asking either how I could get critical work recognized by the field

or how I could convince the field that its boundaries do not work. I know that now I do my work putting the normative questions first, and without assuming that doing discipline-facing or discipline-conversant work is necessarily normatively preferable. That said, I have *no* idea whether I get that right, and I also know that I am making these choices leading with my normative sensibilities now from a position of career stability, while others in the field are taking much more significant risks to do much more innovative work, contra the discipline's "disciplining" power. Perhaps the work that needs to be done is less "boundary work" and more work to deconstruct the field's boundaries and the disciplining power that keeps them intact.

Olumide

Laura's insights are thought-provoking and rich in self-reflection. However, is the distinction between the external world and the private disciplinary space—a potential site for ontological arrogance—always necessary? Is this separation a luxury for some? Scholars with compounded lived experiences of war, exploitation, and domestic abuse who strive to find their place within foisted-upon dominant Eurocentric frameworks may disagree. Violence in academic spaces can appear less visible and fleeting, but its consequences are profound, impacting physical and mental health, and leading to tragic outcomes, as seen in well-publicised employment tribunal cases related to institutional racism.

Numerous stories of violence and inequality flood our timelines, yet some groups affected by violence are often missing from media reporting. This reflection is not intended to create an "oppression Olympics" mentality; rather, the unique experiences of marginalised groups require a clear understanding of their societal positioning. Patricia Hill Collins' (2022) matrix of domination illustrates why this group-based analysis is important. Preventing all forms of violence is crucial, and every instance should be valued, whether it occurs in London, Gaza, or Congo. For example, the absence of mainstream coverage regarding large-scale deaths of women and children in Congo reflects a chilling parallel with the lack of attention to missing Black women in the UK and the US. When I advocate for collapsing boundaries, I am calling for an end to the distancing practices that categorize these issues as happening to "those poor Black people" (or any other marginalized group) and separate them from the disciplines that shape what deserve our attention. Efforts by those engaged in emancipatory, activist-driven, and cross-disciplinary work often clash with established theories and those powerfully positioned to influence societal understanding, complicating the path to complex systemic change. This is a risk that arises when working across these so-called "boundary zones."

When dialogic spaces are intentionally curated with both safety and action-oriented systemic change in mind, what emerges from this discourse is that while there is a risk that boundaries can often delineate the Self from Others, bridging through inclusive dialogue and communicative action is possible to allow the flourishing of hopeful alterities (see Mulgahaes 2025). The type of boundary collapse I advocate can manifest as what Karen Boyle refers to as "continuum thinking" (Boyle 2018). Boundaries can then be constructed as a force for hopeful change.

This also means that we must accept that some questions are challenging because multiple truths can coexist. It's crucial to hold these truths in tension while working across boundary zones. We must approach complex issues, like the epidemic of intimate partner violence and the avoidable killings in Gaza, with humility. Alexandria's idea about using boundary language as a protective measure is worth noting. For instance, counter-safe(r) spaces established by and for Black and racialized women aim to empower and heal from race-based trauma, challenging the ontological and epistemic arrogance present in various disciplines. This "zoning" practice seeks to shift power and reclaim narratives, highlighting the need for radical collective rethinking, which I see as a systemic issue rather than an individual one.

Koen

Our conversation demonstrates the messiness of working with not only violence as a theme, but also with the language of border/boundaries that for many is predicated on violence (as Alexandria explained above). We are simultaneously asking whether the collapsing of boundaries can help us understand violence differently, and reckoning with the nature of boundaries are their impact on lives. So, I do share Laura's discomfort, yet I would not make such a strong separation between the disciplinary boundaries and worldly one (similar to Olumide).

I am not denying the different forms and intensity of violence experiences in both spaces, nor do I advocate to collapse these into the same discussion, but I am mindful, as Zizek (2008) reminds us, that a strong focus on the spectacular acts of violence can make us blind to the more structural forms of violence. More so, such blindness, in turn, produces the core belief that the violence embedded within each boundary zone is inherently different.

Of course, there are important differences, and I do not want to minimize the horror of the violences described by Laura. Rather, I would argue to move towards a focus that is not solely based in experiences and different forms of violence, but emphasizes violence as a process and a relational phenomenon. Doing so, we can see that the boundaries within the discipline are not much different in their structure and operations than those Laura speaks of. Just as the academy mirrors and reproduces the violences of the wider world (Bourdieu 1988; Ahmed 2012), there are important links between the "real world" and disciplinary boundaries we discussed, as Alexandria and Olumide have already made clear.

I am thus suggesting an ontological shift. Much like Olumide argues for complexity thinking, I would argue for a more relational approach. Much of our disciplines are rooted in a substantialist ontology that places "things" before relations—that emphasises the substance of social phenomena over the relational structures that create these things. Such viewpoints consider the world to primarily exist of substances and entities with pre-given identities and/or preferences. Many of the social science theories, tend to hold "to the idea that it is entities that come first and relations among them only subsequently" (Emirbayer 1997: 281). In contrast, a relational ontology (Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 2019) invites us to move from seeing the world as composed of discrete entities to viewing it as ongoing processes—shifting from nouns to verbs (Eyben 2010). Doing so, we do not only "imagine that a process is mutable in relation to space and time, as are the mechanisms established to promote it" (Eyben 2010: 388), but also emphasize how the process shapes and produces those entities involved in it.

The point here is twofold; first what happens if we see violence not just as an act that occurs, but as the result of relationships and processes? Of course, relationality is not new to International Political Sociology (IPS) and it often talks about power and violence through elements of relational thinking. Yet somehow this important scholarship has not always been able to escape the "thing-language" (Kurki 2020: 114). A system of dualism remains very present often or as I pointed out elsewhere (Slootmaeckers 2019), slippages toward an essentialization of relational concepts into observable "things" remain very common. Second, by emphasising process, the relational approach forces us to think about the process of *boundary-ing*, rather than boundaries/borders themselves. If boundary-ing is a relational process, then its effects, its function and its ways of operating are also relationally situated and can mean different things and be felt differently for those located differently within this relational context. As Olumide already suggested, multiple truths can be true at the same time. Moreover, it aligns with Laura's call for less "boundary work" (working across or within boundaries) but "more work to deconstruct the field's boundaries and the disciplining power that keeps them intact."

Much like we need an un-disciplining of IR (as discussed earlier), we need to engage in *un-boundary-ing* (as suggested by Olumide above). However, this is not to say that boundary processes are inherently bad or undesirable, rather I see un-boundary-ing as process that seeks to short-circuit power structures (to borrow from Dean Cooper-Cunningham's [2021] approach to queer IR) in an attempt to reduce violence. This would include embracing accepting multiverse of perspectives as well as the ability to hold and negotiate multiple and often competing truths. It requires us to see how the "protective spaces" Alexandria talks about are both a sanctuary for some and a space of exclusion for others—that difference can be both healing and hurting. Drawing on Laura's powerful self-reflection on her own boundary work, we perhaps can start un-boundary-ing by embracing the hard truth that the process of un-boundary-ing is always incomplete and forever ongoing. It presents a politics that, as Cathy Cohen (1997: 438) would say, "provide a space where transformational political work can begin" through a ceaseless interrogation of power and understanding that "progress" always creates new power relations. Thus, the challenge of working across boundary zones is that we must learn to embrace the boundary object heuristic capacities to become what (Lugones 2020: 11) calls "world-travellers" (even across ontologies) and become more aware of the threads that connect us. Perhaps it is a way to engage in translation that allows for common understanding whilst also continuously recognizing how this process in itself can recreate the violence we seek to challenge.

Jana

I see both the difficulty and the importance of drawing and collapsing boundaries as discussed so far. Perhaps we can more systematically think of researching violence as a process and a practice that entails forms of boundary-breaking and boundary-making. Challenging the boundaries of what we understand as violence is closely connected with the concerns of epistemic (in)justice at the borderlines of dominant frameworks through which violence tends to be recognized (Butler 2004). Here, collapsing boundaries means questioning the often taken for granted hegemony of who determines whose experiences of violence fit into a generic definition and who remains excluded. For example, take the common disregard of state-sanctioned violence against noncitizens in the name of illegality of border crossing across Europe, where violence against migrants or people on the move is obscured under the technical umbrella term of border security and immigration control (Andersson 2014). While critical feminist research on migration contributes to making sense of the continuity of intersectional violence against marginalised populations (Canning 2020), questioning this normative logic is key to recalibrate the focus on harm and victimisation beyond citizenship or ambiguous notions of legality. It is ultimately about demarginalizing and denormalizing such violence. However, there is a crucial difference between pushing boundaries towards a more inclusive understanding of violence and reducing people's experiences to experiences of trauma, pain, and suffering (Tuck and Yang 2014). To resist both exclusionary and essentialist framings of violence, we need to embrace its transcending social nature, which comes with unstable epistemological boundaries.

When I refer to boundary-making, on the other hand, I have in mind the balancing act between proximity and distance, solidarity and (self-)care, when researching violence. Creating boundaries in the context of violence can also have a protective function, as Alexandria already highlighted above. Setting boundaries is not equal to being indifferent and consequently running the risk of reproducing "epistemic harms" (Landström and Crawley 2024: 89). Notably, to talk about emotions and safeguarding in research settings is a relatively new development, and it is telling that scholars researching sexualized violence and femicide/homicide started to publish about the emotional labor involved in the work, including vicarious trauma and

resilience when working on violence (Campbell 2013; Cullen et al. 2021). Yet, drawing boundaries—for everyone involved—can be essential to prevent getting caught in a cycle of violence and instead contribute towards ways to "re-orient boundary work towards a more radical approach," as Olumide put it.

Theme 3: Toward a Practice of Productive Boundary Work and Brokerage

Our discussions so far showed that the difficulties of translation are not obstacles to working with violence across disciplines but are constitutive of what that work can produce. Still, this work is not easy. As such, we reflect on what we have learned about engaging productively with boundary objects, not as a prescriptive account of what good practice looks like, but an epistemological argument for what makes boundary work productive. Namely, keeping the costs of translation visible rather than naturalizing them in the pursuit of convergence, and remaining alert to how the researcher is always already implicated in the very processes they are studying. Throughout, we grappled with the extent to which we can talk about violence "out there" and as separate to the structures we exist within in the academy (a tension we do not believe is fully resolvable, nor should it be). Wherever we position ourselves within this discussion, the tension highlights a core, not unfamiliar, point: We all are somehow implicated in violence, and should be cautious as to the effects of our work in our disciplines and in the world.

International Relations, as a discipline has been haunted by boundaries established in its disciplinary historiography, (see Dunne, Cox, and Booth 1998), its navigation of disciplinary identity that spans the social sciences and humanities and has led to epistemological warfare (Monroe 2005), and an at-times-contentious politics of normative responsibility embedded in scholarship (Smith 2004 ; Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020; Waever and Buzan 2020). Working with violence as a boundary object permits working at the boundary of the academy and "the world," but it also requires acknowledging that these disciplinary hauntings are themselves expressions of the costs of translation, shaping what IR can and cannot see about violence. Opportunities for productive boundary work and brokerage are afforded by the perspectival shift that is introduced and also to some degree showcased in this collective discussion.

The discussion above demonstrates that by looking through the lens of a boundary object, we do not necessarily need to *reconcile* contested ontologies of violence. The "work" that we do to traverse and travel different boundary spaces can be valuable processes of meaning-making for different actors that can help to push different fields forward and shift our perspectives on what and why certain types of violence are made to count and not others. This also recognizes that boundary objects, such as violence, can also "shape-shift" (Nathues et al. 2024). We can see this in, for example, the influence and reach of the social-ecological model mentioned above: originally a theory of human development applied within the context of public health and including violence against women (e.g., Heise 1998), though originally with some resistance (see Walklate 2025). Not only do these conceptual approaches shape definitions of violence, but they also guide modes of prevention, the allocation of resource, and attributions of responsibility. The process of doing boundary work means that we can engage new understandings of a concept or revise our own across different ontologies. Perhaps in this sense, efforts to collapse or remove boundaries misses the point of the boundary object lens: that violence can exist in a boundary space and be legible in conversations by a broad range of actors without necessarily needing ontological consensus. For example, a social statistician who seeks to measure the prevalence of violence in a "post-conflict" society might be able to come to some agreement with a feminist geographer aiming to critically interrogate gender-based violence in the same setting, without needing a shared ontology. The value of applying the boundary object lens here is not to reconcile what sometimes seem

to be competing concepts of violence but to bring them into contact and dialogue with one another. In what follows we move toward identifying productive practices of boundary work and brokerage, reflecting on the lessons learnt from our experiences and from the preceding discussion.

Elizabeth

There is some recognition in the preceding sections that disciplinary boundaries require *work*. Such "work" can include acts that create, re-form or transform boundaries, as well as those which reinforce and maintain them (including as rhetorical devices to distinguish some knowledge and discredit others; see Gieryn 1983; Tilley 2004). Implicit across these contributions is that boundaries act as barriers, though I hope it is also possible to talk about boundary work as an opportunity for action (Star 2010), collaboration and co-production.

On this note, there is much to be learned from multiscalar or multisystem efforts to understand violence, such as Pain's (2014) analysis of everyday terrorism and global terrorism. Shifting the conceptual parameters of violence to be more expansive might not only afford us a fuller view of violence and the structures that sustain it, but also a fuller view of what counts as *knowledge* on violence and perhaps from what place it is made. In *Lethal Intersections*, Hill Collins (2024: 9) writes that:

> *What counts as violence often pivots on whether it is visible and easily recognizable as such to most people, or whether it remains invisible to people as they go about their daily lives.*

Continuing, Hill Collins (2024: 11) argues that violence—who uses it, how it is experienced, how it is counted—is organized by systems of power which go beyond the *interpersonal*, and permeate *structural*, *disciplinary,* and *cultural* domains. This remains true for the way we count and consider the validity of data, measurement, and knowledge on violence, as Gene identified during the discussion in his mention of "epistemic arrogance."

Moving forward and thinking about how we do "productive boundary work," there seems to be a more fundamental case here for humility (as Olumide mentioned) in research culture and the provision of support and resource to do boundary work that is not disincentivized. A natural follow-on from this call (as also suggested by Jana) might be to surface discussions of ethics in knowledge production, acknowledging the power imbalances between and within different disciplines that have been amplified by uneven funding flows. Besides other things, this would also include foregrounding the *naming* of violence and being explicit about how language and labelling can serve to reinforce particular assumptions about responsibility, agency, and blame (e.g., whether the term domestic abuse, domestic violence, gender-based violence, or men's violence against women is used; see Boyle 2018).

Changes to research culture must also be accompanied by strategic and structural change to infrastructures that support meaningful and ethical boundary work. For example, the creation of new funding streams and peer-reviewed journals, which support the publication of interdisciplinary research speak to the creation of new spaces for knowledge production and exchange.

Olumide

I agree with Elizabeth's points on the opportunities for effective boundary work and the importance of collective efforts. Leveraging the relational energy mentioned by Koen is crucial for fostering trust and shared purpose. Co-producing research agendas is key in valuing boundary work. I propose creating a co-produced agenda for change rooted in principles of inclusivity, intersectionality, and equity, using data to identify gaps in our understanding. As Koen noted, we should aim to bring

marginalized epistemologies and perspectives to the centre by integrating decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist approaches.

We need to clarify shared principles of boundary work and consider ethical implications. Inclusive dialogue is crucial, and while context matters, we should seek *relational* commonalities in ethical reasoning without rigidly adhering to universal codes. Embracing both divergences and convergences and being able to hold both in tension can lead to a more holistic approach to doing productive boundary work.

Koen

Both Elizabeth and Olumide make excellent points to which I can only wholeheartedly agree. The need for humility, self-reflection and being able to hold divergences and convergences in tension ring particularly true to me. Such positions connect to ideas I sought to invoke earlier through Cathy Cohen's (Cohen 1997) queer politics, in which we must assume that even when we strive to do good, we inevitably may create a new structure of power and new exclusions. As such, I believe "good practice" of boundary work must be infused with an ethos of care, centered on humility, and above all stems from a compassionate curiosity to the mindset of those we seek to engage when doing boundary work.

In thinking about opportunities for productive boundary-ing work, I cannot help reflecting on the role emotions have played both in the in-person conversations we had and during the writing of this piece. Too often, emotions are considered to not play a role in research practice, academic debate is supposed to be predicated in rational and logical arguments. Yet, research is inherently an emotional endeavour (Clarke et al. 2014). To spend years and years studying a topic require an emotional investment, an emotional attachment of sorts. This means that when we meet challenges to our intellectual contributions, our ways of thinking, our disciplines, and emotions are never far away. In fact, they are more central than perhaps some would care to admit. When I reflect back on the energy in the rooms when we met in person, emotions were more often present than absent. Even amongst a group of people with a share political project, our attempts at bridging disciplinary boundaries (doing the boundary work) touched sensitivities. We were at times guided by emotional responses to the use of language, the ways in which our taken-for-granted viewpoints had become challenged or in which we perhaps felt out point of view was not recognised fully. When such emotions operate in the background without proper consideration, they may become a barrier to "seeing" and "hearing" one another—unacknowledged or hidden emotions may lead to "mismeetings," tensions, and potentially breakdowns in doing boundary-ing work.

Thus, I would advocate for an emotionally focused approach to boundary-ing work; an approach in which time is made to explore and interrogate emotional responses. What can emerge when we look beneath the struggles that come with doing the boundary work? What happens when we slow down the conversation, especially when it becomes intense, to explore not what we say and the content of the different perspectives, but focus on the emotions evoked by the boundary work? How can the acknowledgement of emotions help to overcome division and (re-)build connections? So, my appeal for a productive practice to do boundary-ing work is to explore how we can work across and with boundaries by bringing to the foreground the emotions that govern and are governed through said boundaries.

Laura

I like all of these suggestions, and think that the discipline might be a better place and "our" collective research better, normatively, and substantively, if many of them became norms in the field. Rather than echo some of the calls above, let me add one more to the mix: a plea for allowing the possibility of being wrong, and of critique of

the field including critique of self as a part of the field. I mean this partly in the sense that self should acknowledge one's own complicity in the many violences of neoliberal academia writ large and of disciplinary IR specifically. But I also mean it in the sense that the field could (and should) be a place where scholars are able to discuss (both concurrently and in hindsight) the problems and even violence in their own work. Currently, the field disincentivizes such discussions in multiple ways, including but not limited to reputation costs, employment costs, publication costs, and grant costs. Yet all of the work that scholars of the field do involves imperfections, complicities, and inescapable violences. It seems important to be able to talk about those in "our" work, and to make space for the acceptability of these discussions across the field. The discipline would be stronger, normatively, and substantively, if it encouraged reflection and self-criticism rather than treating scholarship (and critique) as exercises in competition.

Alexandria

Olumide established some key ideas and opportunities to do boundary work "better" and Koen's observation of the emotion that was present in the room during our in-person discussions and the call to focus on emotion, exploring and interrogating emotional responses and reflecting on our own emotionally charged responses to these thematic discussions is crucial as we pursue ongoing research. In these discussions, some important insights emerge quite strongly: that emotions are core to the study of violence, guiding and contesting our research; and that good practice in the study of violence requires reflexive and reflective research.

In Laura's presentation during the roundtable sessions and the subsequent discussion, she offered the act of *erasing the self as a righteous actor and instead viewing the self as a participant in violence* (from my handwritten notes from the session, with apologies if this does not do justice to the discussion). This, for me, was a moment of perspective shifting. Rather than getting hung up on trying to be the "righteous actor" who subscribes to the *correct* way of thinking about the world—a world that is constantly in flux, and mediated through windows of experience, history, community, and so on—we should think about the process.

If we start out as embedded in our various worlds and we acknowledge the violence of these worlds, then we are always already participants in violence, whether this is knowingly or consciously, or not. To abandon the role of the researcher as the righteous actor who is always necessarily cleansed of violence, we can instead approach work in a way that is both reflective and embedded. I am often cautious in academic engagement, and get hung up on that element of "right" or righteousness and find it (academically) immobilizing. So this call resonated with me as a way to move forward: I refer back here to both Laura's contribution in Section 2 that distinguishes between borders in the world as sites of violence, and disciplinary boundaries that are complicit in and productive of violence; and also Jana's contribution in which she positions the researcher almost as a conduit of violence or of the effects of violence operating in and between these two spaces. Rather than practicing caution or becoming so reflective we only look back at the discipline instead of forward at the world, I think an additional call (to complement Elizabeth's for ethics and humility, Olumide's for co-production and complexity, and Koen's for emotional resonance) is indebted to Laura's contribution during our roundtable: We might aim to work in a way that is normatively engaged and where there is room to be wrong. Adopting the heuristic device of boundary object for the study of violence produces a multiplicity of approaches and conceptual uses and understandings from which we can learn about the operation of violence in the world. Productive boundary work is comfortable doing and undoing, recognizing where violence is created as well as where violence is prevented, and pushes the boundary work to new spaces, and engaging new voices, perspectives, and dimensions. This will permit safety for

self-accountability, to acknowledge past perpetrations of violence, and to move away from path-dependent biases that reproduce such violence in the academy and in the world.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this conversation, we did not strive to provide IPS with a better theory of violence. Rather, we aimed to provide an epistemological heuristic attentive to the conditions under which violence becomes intelligible, and to show that these conditions are shaped by the very violences they cannot see. Approaching violence as a boundary object, we engaged in a conversation that was less strained by disciplinary theoretical boundaries, yet highlighted the ways in which our boundaried thinking can shape analysis and perspectives. We offer our discussion as evidence of the heuristic at work, as a model for boundary work in the discipline. This heuristic device translates conceptual and academic boundary work into practice and experiential engagement *in the world*, whilst remaining attentive to what is left behind. Throughout the conversation, we found that positioning violence as a boundary object pushed us to think beyond theorisation, to embrace reflexivity and praxis. We shied away from a fixed definition of violence, finding productive ground instead in shared attention to the processes through which violence becomes knowable and what those processes cost. Overall, we believe our conversation and our engagement with violence as a boundary object adds a new disposition to IPS. Refusing to provide a new theory or concept of violence (critical approaches to IR already do this), we present the boundary object heuristic as a means of remaining productive within and through the irreconcilable. We excavated the costs of translations of theories and concepts of violence, and sought to keep open the question of one's own implications in shaping the conditions under which violence becomes knowable. As such, we hope this conversation sparks a deeper engagement within IPS toward a reflexive praxis in studying violence, its uses, and effects, that seeks to be transformational of the world and of the institutional architectures in which our research resides.

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