The Peaceful, Deadly Violence of Embargo: Denaturalizing hegemonic discourses in International Relations theory

by

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Abstract

While dominant International Relations (IR) theory has constructed the concept of security in such a way that excludes economic sanctions from considerations of violence, the track record of embargo tells a different story, one with a significantly higher death toll. This project challenges the borders of the hegemonic IR discourse to make room for a theoretical and political account of the deadly impacts of sanction regimes. Through a discourse analysis of IR theory, using Laclau and Mouffe's holistic discourse theory, it looks to the spaces of meaning negotiation emerging from feminist IR theory. The renegotiated concepts of human security and structural violence make visible economic sanctions as acts of violence, and displace the binary oppositions of international/domestic, military/economic, public/private which shield embargo from the sight of its own violence. Having broken embargo out of its conceptually locked box, this project pushes further, and interrogates the connections of embargo and empire. Embargo functions to uphold imperial control and Western interests, while (re)producing racist colonial narratives. While deconstructing and reconstructing three competing understandings of embargo – embargo-as-nonviolent, embargo-as-violence, and embargo-as-imperial – I interrogate the political implications of hegemonic ways of knowing. I argue that, by challenging the hegemony of IR, we can unmask the practice of embargo, and locate its violent role in upholding imperial structures of power.

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Acknowledgments

I begin by acknowledging the peoples upon whose lands I live and work. This project was born as an idea on the unceded territories of the Algonquin peoples, and has been completed on the occupied lands of the Lekwungen peoples, the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. I center this acknowledgement to express gratitude, and with the recognition that I work and speak as a settler on stolen lands.

For their guidance, support and endless patience, I would like to thank my committee – Rita and Claire, this project would not have become what it is without you. Your brilliance and wisdom are littered throughout these pages. Thank you for pushing me, changing me, and inspiring me; I hope to do you proud.

I also have to thank my person, my family and my friends who all got me here, who hold me up and who hold me together. For navigating time differences to always be there for me, and for making this far away place feel like home. Couldn't have done it without you.

Introduction

Writing at the end of World War One, Woodrow Wilson spoke of an instrument that would put an end to war and ensure a lasting peace. "That is the remedy that thoughtful men have advocated for several generations," he assured.[1] "They have thought, and thought truly, that war was barbarous."[2] This tool, on the other hand, was more effective than war, and would make war obsolete. "[When] you have got your hand upon the throat of the offending nation, it is a proper punishment."[3] This instrument brings a country to its knees, no state would dare declare war with the threat of this terrible remedy.[4] What is this most powerful tool for which Wilson advocates? "An absolute isolation," he cries, "a boycott!"[5] Yes, indeed – "Apply this economic, peaceful, silent, deadly remedy and there will be no need for force."[6]

This project does not seek to evaluate the strength of Wilson's case. It is not interested in the truth of his claims, his historical accuracy or the impact of his rhetoric on the burgeoning League of Nations. Instead, it is interested in Wilson's logic; a logic by which boycott can be held as simultaneously peaceful and deadly. I am interested in showing that this logic has remained hegemonic in dominant IR theory, and in rejecting the terms that allow it to claim both peace and destruction. This thesis takes on the international practice of embargo, and seeks to inhabit it differently, to challenge the neutralization couched in naturalization which make invisible imperial violences. It locates, unpacks

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[1] Woodrow Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations*, ed. Hamilton Foley (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1923), 71, http://archive.org/details/woodrowwilsonsca01wils.

[2] Wilson, 71.

[3] Wilson, 71.

[4] Wilson, 69–70.

[5] Wilson, 69.

[6] Wilson, 71.

and interrogates three competing constructions of embargo in International Relations (IR) theory – as nonviolent, as violence, and as imperial. By engaging in deconstruction, this project seeks to de-*neutralize* the practice of embargo and de-*naturalize* its common understanding as a peaceful tool. It seeks to tear off its mask, and make visible its violence. The following pages open political and theoretical space for the consideration of embargo's violence, and interrogate the political function of centering some constructions of embargo while others remain marginalized. Deconstructing those assumptions that hold power, that are granted authority, is a political project, especially when neutralized beliefs hold the authority of peace. No violence should be allowed to pass for peace with impunity – and the theory that shields violence is itself violent. To that end, this project asks: What is the function of different understandings of the practice of embargo? How does hegemony determine what is seeable in IR, and what function does that serve in justifying, legitimizing and making necessary certain forms of global action? What happens if we inhabit "embargo" differently, imagine other worlds, and make use of different assumptions, and dislocated discourses?

Historical context

Many accounts of embargo begin their discussions with an appeal to a long history of economic statecraft. They situate the strategy of blockading economic trade in a history dating back to the Ancient Greeks, and the Athenian ban on trade from Megara in the lead up to the Peloponnesian war.[7] Such a move serves to legitimate the practice through

[7] See for example: Steve Chan and A. Cooper Drury, "Sanctions as Economic Statecraft: An Overview," in *Sanctions as Economic Statecraft: Theory and Practice*, ed. Steve Chan and A. Cooper Drury, International Political Economy Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 1, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596979_1; Kristina Lyn Heitkamp, ed., *Economic Sanctions*, Global Viewpoints (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, 2019), 12; William H. Kaempfer and Anton D. Lowenberg, "Chapter 27 The Political Economy of Economic Sanctions," in *Handbook of Defense Economics*, vol. 2 (Elsevier, 2007), 869, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0013(06)02027-8.

precedent, granting it the authority that comes with the designation of "an age-old tool."[8] In addition, it sets up a misleading precedent: whereas siege warfare was precisely that, a strategy of war, the economic embargos of the twentieth century to which these analyses refer are not established as acts of war, nor do they take the same shape as their historical predecessors. Joy Gordon (1999) locates the moment of sanctions evolving to take on a peaceful connotation during the formation of the League of Nation.[9] This happens to coincide both with the birth of the field of academia known as International Relations, and with the creation of the Mandate system for ex-colonies, and new iterations of imperial control under the guise of self-determination.[10] Woodrow Wilson, one of the architects of the League, believed in the benefit of sanctions as a preemptive measure to military warfare, and sought to preserve its use for the prevention of war. Under this framework, the practice of boycott and embargo became inscribed in international parlance, law and IR theorization as an alternative to warfare, an economic tool for the prevention of military escalation. This understanding of the practice was upheld in the language of the United Nations' Charter, where the use of embargo is authorized in response to "threats to the peace, breaches of the peace or acts of aggression."[11] It is defined by Article 41, which reads:

> The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include

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[8] Meghan L. O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 1.

[9] Joy Gordon, "A Peaceful, Silent, Deadly Remedy: The Ethics of Economic Sanctions," *Ethics & International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (March 1999): 123, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.1999.tb00330.x.

[10] Antony Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (2006): 747 argues that Third World sovereignty was created in such a way as to serve Western interests. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

[11] U.N. Charter ch. VII. http://legal.un.org/repertory/art39.shtml

> complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.[12]

While embargo was defined in the UN Charter in 1945, the practice remained mostly unused until the 1990s. During the Cold War, it was nearly impossible for the United Nations to institute a full embargo since both sides of the polarity held veto power in the Security Council, and any unilateral sanctions applied by either the Soviet Union or the United States would be swiftly undermined by the other and therefore have less impact.[13] The American embargo against the Castro regime in Cuba is illustrative of this conundrum, where support from the USSR made the American embargo on Cuba much less potent, and only after the fall of the Soviet Union were effects profoundly felt by the Cuban people.[14] Prior to 1990, the UNSC had only instituted two sanctions regimes: against Rhodesia in 1966, and against Apartheid South Africa in 1977.[15] The number of multilateral sanctions regimes rose dramatically in the 1990s, however, with the UN levelling sanctions against Iraq, Haiti, Yugoslavia, Serbia, Montenegro, Somalia, Libya, Liberia and Rwanda, all between 1990 and 1995.[16]

The most influential of these regimes was the economic sanctions against Iraq, imposed after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This represented the most comprehensive and severe set of sanctions ever imposed. UN Resolution 661 prohibited the trade, sale or

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[12] U.N. Charter art. 41, para. 1. http://legal.un.org/repertory/art41.shtml

[13] Joy Gordon, "The Invisibility of Human Harm: How Smart Sanctions Consumed All the Oxygen in the Room," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2015): 865.

[14] Argued in Richard Garfield and Sarah Santana, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis and the US Embargo on Health in Cuba.," *American Journal of Public Health* 87, no. 1 (January 1997): 15–20.

[15] Chan and Drury, "Sanctions as Economic Statecraft," 2000, 3.

[16] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 71. This change in policy can be attributed to several factors: the release of the HSE database which found sanctions to have independent effect on policy, and the success of the South African sanction regime for example.

supply of any goods to either Iraq or Kuwait by any UNGA member, with narrow and conditional exceptions only for food and medicine, and strict rules restricting any item that could have a military "double-use."[17] Accounts of the impact of the sanctions on Iraq are filled with horrifying statistics and graphic descriptions, which serve to cut through the cold bureaucratic and technocratic language through which economic sanctions are described, and dislodge its neutrality. They talk about the estimate of 567,000 children who died as a result of the malnutrition, disease and lack of health care infrastructure caused by the economic sanctions regime,[18] the child mortality rate doubling in the decade of the 1990s,[19] and the rising rates of stunting, undernutrition and wasting observed in children under five.[20] In 1992, a liter of water in Basra cost more than a litre of petrol,[21] and by 1997, the cost of food made up 80% of a family's income.[22] This despite the humanitarian measures taken by the UN, including the Food-For-Oil program which was so backed-up by bureaucratic red-tape and UN commissions that it did little to alleviate the suffering.[23] Additionally, access to food alone could not solve the crisis. As one FAO worker commented, "If you don't have electricity, you don't have water and sanitation, you don't have health."[24] This is not just the story from Iraq, where the extent

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[17] Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 21.

[18] Lori Buck, Nicole Gallant, and Kim Richard Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft: The Case of Iraq," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): 80.

[19] George Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People," in *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, ed. Anthony Arnove, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 174.

[20] Peter L. Pellett, "Sanctions, Food, Nutrition, and Health in Iraq," in *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, ed. Anthony Arnove, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 193.

[21] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 79.

[22] Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People," 175.

[23] Gordon, *Invisible War*, 29.

[24] Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People," 174.

of the humanitarian disaster has the potential of being blamed on the Hussein regime rather than the UN sanctions.[25] In the same decade in Haiti, people jumped into the sea to flee the island sinking under the weight of their economic sanctions; in Yugoslavia, seniors froze in their homes from lack of heating.[26] The effects are being seen currently in Venezuela, where Amnesty International has warned the UN and the US against sanctions which would exacerbate the crisis conditions of the country, despite the humanitarian exemptions in place,[27] and Venezuela's foreign ministry has called the US sanctions "economic terrorism."[28] The same conditions of the Iraqi sanctions can be seen replaying in Iran, where in 2018 the UN Special Rapporteur warned that "these unjust and harmful sanctions are destroying the economy and currency of Iran, driving millions of people into poverty," as well as leading to "silent deaths in hospitals as medicines run out."[29] Continually the humanitarian watch-groups and exemptions have failed to protect the most vulnerable populations from the harm inflected by international sanctions.

The approach to the practice of economic sanctions has nominally changed since the 1990s. The Iraq experience was recognized as a humanitarian disaster, and launched many discussions about the ways to alleviate the humanitarian cost in the future. The issue was addressed in a series of UN committees, panels, and recommendations,

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[25] As noted in Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 70.

[26] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, 71; See also Albert C. Pierce and National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Just War Principles and Economic Sanctions," *Ethics & International Affairs* 10 (March 1996): 99–113, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.1996.tb00005.x.

[27] Amnesty International, "New Sanctions by the United States Put Venezuelan Population at Greater Risk of Human Rights Violations" (Amnesty International, August 9, 2019), https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5308642019ENGLISH.PDF.

[28] Jim Wyss, "U.S. Sanctions Put Venezuela in 'Club of Rogue States' like Cuba, Syria, North Korea," *Miami Herald*, August 6, 2019, https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article233569847.html.

[29] "Iran 2018," Amnesty International, accessed October 12, 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/.

centering on how to ensure access to humanitarian supplies – medicines, food, etc. – during a condition of embargo.[30] The issue has also been addressed through the adoption of "smart" sanctions, targeting specific goods – such as oil, arms or "luxury goods" – or targeting specific individuals or entities – travel bans or asset freezes on government officials, for example. Gordon notes that the rhetoric of smart sanctions has come to dominate contemporary practices of embargo, leaving behind mechanisms and bodies that tend to humanitarian concerns.[31] By contrasting targeted "smart" sanctions to past sanctions, labelling them "dumb" sanctions implicitly, these regimes are differentiated from past disasters and are therein legitimized.[32] Framing such as O'Sullivan's (2003) "shrewd sanctions" perpetuates this image of targeted and surgical strikes, which bolster the perception of the humanitarian sensitivity of these new sanction regimes, and contribute to a blindness to their impacts.[33]

These rhetorical changes reflected a need to address the public relations question of civilian casualties, but the logic of the sanction remained unchanged: the suffering of a country's people is leveraged to force a foreign government into compliance. Gordon compares the sanction logic to that of a siege, where "civilian suffering is not "collateral" damage, but rather is the primary objective of the siege strategy, or at least the

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[30] Such as the 1998 Report from the UN Consultants at Brown and Notre Dame Universities, the 1998 conference on Banking, Crime and Economic Sanctions, the 1998 Symposium on Targeted Sanctions, the 1999 Interlaken Process and the Watson Institute's Targeted Financial Sanctions Project, etc. Gordon, "The Invisibility of Human Harm," 871. Further research could extend the discourse analysis of this project to this source base.

[31] Gordon, 872.

[32] Nephew, in his policy case for effective sanctions, notes that the literature of smart sanctions creates a perception of their bloodlessness by creating a contrast with past harmful sanctions like Iraq. Richard Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field*, Center on Global Energy Policy Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 11.

[33] O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*. Carol Cohn argued in 1987 a similar phenomenon with the strategic language of nuclear defense intellectuals, and the neutralization of the language of "clean bombs," and "collateral damage," which make unseeable the mangled human remains of a nuclear attack. Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687–718.

foreseeable and direct result of siege."[34] As this thesis will explore, if there were no impact on the target population, the embargo could not be expected to have an effect. The logic of the embargo requires that the state feel responsible to preserve the well-being of their people and so necessitates a threat to the population, and to the country's GDP. While the US embargo is mainly on Venezuelan government officials, they identify the pressure coming from "accelerating the decline in Venezuela's oil production."[35] In addition, being a sanctioned state has the secondary result of deterring international business investment for fear of retribution from global powers. The new language of "smart sanctions," or of humanitarian considerations, do not alter the fundamental logic of the sanction, as can be seen in Amnesty International's recent warning on Venezuela. These rhetorical changes have also not altered embargo's classification in the UN Charter, where it remains defined as it was in 1945: as a nonviolent alternative to force. Sanctions have also not been phased out of use by these revelations of their damaging impacts. The United Nations currently has 14 ongoing sanction regimes,[36] the United States 31,[37] and Canada 20.[38] I chose to center Canada in this list, not only because it is

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[34] Gordon, "A Peaceful, Silent, Deadly Remedy," 125.

[35] Clare Ribando Seelke, "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions," In Focus (Congressional Research Service, August 22, 2019), 1, crs.gov.

[36] The states against which the UN has sanctions are: Central African Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen. Other associated sanctions, see "Sanctions," United Nations Security Council, accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/information.

[37] The states against which the US has sanctions are: Belarus, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Nicaragua, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan and Darfur, South Sudan, Syra, Ukraine/Russia, Venezuela, Yemen, Zimbabwe. It has 11 other sanction regimes against groups or specific issues, to see more; Treasury Department Resource Center, "Sanctions Programs and Country Information," U.S. Department of the Treasury, October 11, 2019, https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/programs/pages/programs.aspx.

[38] The states against which Canada has sanctions are: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea, Russia, Somalia, South Suda, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, Zimbabwe. Information on current and former sanctions on "Current Sanctions Imposed by Canada," Government of Canada, September 8, 2019,

the location from which I speak, but because the Canadian state has a practice of distancing itself from the negative international image of the United States, and asserting its difference and its benevolence.[39] Canada is not an absent or innocent party in this discussion, despite its best intentions to be perceived as such, and the conversation of embargo remains a pressing one on the international stage.

Discursive methodology

In IR theory, we will see several competing understandings of the practice of embargo. While dominant theory constructs embargo as a nonviolent tool, critical theory in IR provides the tools to understand embargo as violence, and further as imperialism. In order to unpack the function and purpose of these competing understandings of embargo, this thesis will use a discursive theoretical framework, one which regards knowledge as a process located within relations of power. In this project, I treat the sphere of international relations – both its theory and its practice – as a discourse, as understood by Ernesto Laclau and Chantale Mouffe (1985, 2014).[40] I chose to recognize the co-determinacy of power and knowledge, as Foucault formulated it, and therefore seek to illuminate the power behind our knowledges, the processes of knowledge-making and knowledge-legitimating, and its situatedness.[41] I draw from the questions Mary Hawkesworth (1989) poses – who are the knowers, what is known and how is it

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https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/current-actuelles.aspx?lang=eng.

[39] This is the argument made, for example, in Todd Gordon, *Imperialist Canada* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub, 2010).

[40] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Verso, 2014).

[41] Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect : Studies in Governmentality : With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

known?[42] I am motivated by the feminist attention to relations of power,[43] and by the suspicion, sparked by Gayatri Spivak, that "what is at the center often hides a repression."[44] In deconstructing the concept of embargo, I attempt to dislocate and to displace that center, and open the door to question that which is assumed, self-evident, common-sense and unquestionable.

This project picks up Ann Stoler's (2016) Foucauldian call to engage in what she calls "concept work," as a means of breaking our conceptual habits, and to thinking otherwise.[45] She encourages us to ask: what work do we do with concepts, and, at the same time, what work do concepts do on us?[46] What purpose do our concepts serve? How are they stabilized, sedimented and secured? What authority is invested in ready-made and unquestioned concepts? On the other hand, Stoler asks what do concepts occlude? What is made unobservable, irrelevant or illegitimate by the categories built by the concept? What, and who, is lost by dismissal? These are the questions we will ask of some of IR's foundational concepts – of statehood, security, violence – in order to understand embargo's protected position, and displace it from its closed discursive case. We turn our attention to the "porous and policed peripheries" of concepts,[47] and to the "obscurities on which clarity is based."[48] This project seeks to identify the boundaries and

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[42] Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," *Signs* 14, no. 3 (1989): 533–57.

[43] Carol Cohn and Cynthia Enloe, "A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War," *Signs* 28, no. 4 (2003): 1193, https://doi.org/10.1086/368326.

[44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. David Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 31.

[45] Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 9.

[46] Stoler, 9.

[47] Stoler, 9.

[48] Stoler, 18.

borders of IR; both to interrogate what is accomplished by their enforcement, and to explore what lies beyond them.

Although my project, and arguably most discursive work, is rooted in Foucault's thought, I have chosen to use Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse, as laid out in their 1985 publication *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*.[49] Their theory of discourse provides concrete analytical tools with which to unpack and decode discursive formations, and the processes of meaning-fixation and hegemonic closure. Unlike the Critical Discourse Analysis derived more directly from Foucault's work, Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of discourse is explicitly holistic, encompassing textual and material formations.[50] In order to explain IR as a scholarship and a practice, this material element of the discourse is vital to my analysis. They also provide the analytical tools to operationalize the concept of hegemony, allow me to locate hegemonic power in what I call dominant or traditional IR theory – the discursive formation that is made up of (neo)realist and (neo)liberal theoretical frameworks.

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse is holistic, which means they approach all social processes as rooted in discourse. They see discursive spaces as constituting all social areas in which, and all social practices through which, meaning is created. Since we all require systems of meaning to interact with in the world, we are never external to a discursive space. *Discourse*, then, is the combined totality of all the meanings that make up the world view of an individual, and of a society. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse therefore is also material, not simply interested in text: objects that exist in material

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[49] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

[50] David R. Howarth, *Discourse*, Concepts in the Social Sciences (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 106.

reality are understood and given meaning through discursive filters. Laclau and Mouffe assert the discursivity of all practices, rejecting, as they say, "the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices."[51] They embrace, as a Gramsian approach would call it, the co-determinacy of ideas and materiality, and affirm the holistic character of discourse: no object or practice is an *a priori* given, and can only be constituted as an object or a practice within discursive conditions of emergence.[52] In other words, how we understand something shapes how we act towards it, and therefore its material character is discursive. As we will see later, the textual definitions of embargo, as codified in legal documents, gives rise to the condition of possibility for the practice of embargo as well as the response it elicits. The discourse of embargo, therefore, shapes the frames through which it is applied, and through which its implementation is understood. Discourse is responsible both for the international agreements and accords that legislate the sanction, and for the schools without pencils because the lead in them was deemed of potential military double-use.[53]

Laclau and Mouffe use a granular and technical vocabulary, which we will unpack here. Discourse, in their language, is "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice," whereby relations are established between elements such that their identities change.[54] Following along a long tradition of post-structural thinkers, Laclau and Mouffe assume that nothing has inherent meaning – all meaning is fixed to language

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[51] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 94.

[52] Laclau and Mouffe, 94.

[53] The education system in Iraq suffered from lack of supplies due to their potential double use, among other factors. Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 71; Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2008).

[54] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 91.

and practices through social processes. Meaning-fixation is therefore a process, and *signs* – the words we use, specific objects of meaning – are temporarily fixed with meaning when they become associated with, and positioned against, other signs in their discursive network.[55] Laclau and Mouffe break down this process of fixing meaning into a series of moving parts by which discourses takes shape. A *moment* is a sign or a concept with an understood meaning (however temporarily and contingently fixed). An *element* is a sign without a specific fixed meaning, whose identity is not yet known, and is also at times known as a *floating signifier*. *Articulation,* therefore, is the process by which an element becomes a moment. A concept gets situated in relation to other signs and (temporarily and contingently) affixed with meaning. For example, if you were to encounter a pear for the first time, you might be told that it is like an apple but softer and sweeter. In this articulation, the unknown element "pear" is set in relation to the understood moment "apple." Not only does the pear now have an understood meaning – it is a fruit with certain qualities, a core, a stem, etc. – but you would know how to act towards it – it is to be eaten like an apple. The *element* has been placed within your discursive frame and understanding of the world through its relation and differentiation from a stable sign; this is an articulatory *moment*. We will see this process later in relation to the sign "embargo," and its relation to concepts of security and statehood. The process of discourse formation means that through a series of temporary meaning fixations by established relations and differentiations, an understanding of the world around us emerges. Discourse, as it is understood by Laclau and Mouffe, therefore, is a network of processes, and is constantly (re)establishing and (re)negotiating itself. The term and associated practice of "embargo,"

[55] Saussure used the language of sign, signified and signifier to delineate the meaning from the object and the word, as a textualist and structural analysis of meaning-making and language. Howarth, *Discourse*, 19, 35.

therefore, need not be understood in a single particular way. Rather, it gains meaning from the processes and discourses through which we understand it.

Meaning in discursive construction is always necessarily three things: relational, temporary and contingent. It is relational because the identities of our signs are dependent on the meanings of related signs in the discursive web. As Stoler put it in her description of the work of concepts, "A concept accumulates force," (and we can also understand power and meaning) "from the other concepts that congeal, collide, and rearrange themselves around it."[56] Signs that represent large defining concepts, and in relation to which the meanings of many elements are organized, are referred to as *nodal points*.[57] These privileged or master signs, through their relational connections, confer identities onto a network of other concepts within the discursive formation. We will see later how much the understood meaning of security and statehood influence our ability to see violence internationally, and the identity with which we inscribe embargo: the meaning of embargo is therefore defined relationally to the organizing concepts – or nodal points – of security and violence.

Discourse is also temporary because meanings are always in the process of being fixed, of congealing and colliding, and therefore are never permanently settled, never completely sewn closed, contingency never completely eliminated. Laclau and Mouffe argue "the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture."[58] Since discourse is based on a connected network of articulatory moments, it is always in

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[56] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 19.

[57] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 99.

[58] Laclau and Mouffe, 98.

process, and always being negotiated. It is always possible, therefore, to rip open the seam and remake the garment anew. Any single discursive moment is temporary.

Finally, discourse is contingent. There are always alternative meanings possible, and the fixed meaning is not objective, *apriori* or natural. It is for this reason that I challenge the assumptions of IR discourses: they are never as natural or common-sense as they have been made to appear. And because of that, there are always alternatives. To some, a pear may be only slightly different from an apple in texture and taste, but to another with a deadly allergy to pears, the object will hold a completely different meaning, and will be acted towards very differently. The meaning of "pear," therefore, is not singular or universal, but is rather contingent on context and experience, and the other characteristics of one's discursive network. The process of articulation temporarily privileges a single meaning above possible others, but those alternative meanings exist alongside discourse, in an ever-present *field of discursivity*, reminding us of the contingency of all seemingly stable meaning.[59] A discourse will always have a combination of relatively stable signs (in our example, "apples"), and *floating signifiers*, for whom meaning is yet to be fixed (our "pears"). In claiming to fix a single meaning to the floating signifier, all of its other possibilities are temporarily silenced in the privileging of a single condition of being; when embargo is understood as nonviolent, it cannot also be violent.

Contention over the fixation of signifiers produces discursive struggle, and becomes the site for exertions of power.[60] Following in the post-structural tradition, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize that these articulations – these spaces of temporary stabilization of

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[59] Laclau and Mouffe, 100.

[60] Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 28.

uncertainty – are not separate from processes and relationships of power. Hegemony, as they understand it, is constantly attempting to forcefully fix moments across difference; to eliminate uncertainty, to make single the multiplicity, and to establish what is understood as universal within a discursive space. As Marianne Jørgensen (2002) describes it, hegemony is "where unambiguity is reconstituted through forceful articulation."[61] While hegemonic knowledges and meanings are still contingent, and still temporary, they work to establish their own self-evidence, to justify their existence and to define their necessity.[62] Where there is great variety, hegemony will see to fix a singularity which serves its interests. This particularly forceful form of articulation is referred to as *closure* in this literature, whereby the *field of discursivity* is shunted from view, and *elements* and *floating signifiers* are reduced to single stabilized meanings.[63] Meaning fixation is political and material, and hegemonic discursive formations serve the interests of hegemonic power. Cox (1981) refers to the materiality of hegemony by his identification of the co-constitutive social forces by which hegemonic power is expressed: ideas, material capabilities, and institutions.[64] When Stoler says that "there is work that goes into securing [concepts'] stability, and into their repeated and assertive performance,"[65] Laclau and Mouffe would say that work is done by hegemony.

By hegemony, therefore, I do not mean in the neo-realist sense of a single overwhelming state power, with the material capability to secure its interests regardless

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[61] Jørgensen and Phillips, 48.

[62] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 125.

[63] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 28.

[64] Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1981): 137, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501.

[65] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 18.

of competition.[66] Instead, I am interested in the relations of power by which some knowledges, norms, and rules become universal, common-sense, and singular.[67] The debate over whether it can be said that a single global "hegemon" exists is not the interest of this work, nor whether this hegemony reflects the interest of a state, a class or an economic order.[68] Instead, I focus on operationalizing the concept of hegemony through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the process by which specificity becomes granted the power and authority of singularity, and the political impacts of the assumed "common-sense" on the horizons of the possible, the conditions of possibility.

Hegemony's goal is to achieve the status of common-sense, for its singularity to not be questioned.[69] The hegemonic project of *closure* is never final, however, and the field of discursivity is never eliminated entirely. Laclau and Mouffe stress that hegemony is always in conflict and in peril, the contingency of even hegemonic discourses is always in danger of being made visible. *Social antagonism* is the process in which conflicting or contradicting discourses collide, and we are made aware of the contingencies of our

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[66] As seen in works such as: Robert George Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation: The Political Economy of Foreign Direct Investment*, Political Economy of International Relations Series (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[67] "World hegemony… is expressed in universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behavior for states and for those forces of civil society that act across national boundaries – rules which support the dominant mode of production." Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method," *Millennium* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 1983): 172, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298830120020701.

[68] Debates in neo-Gramscian theory include: Anthony Payne, "US Hegemony and the Reconfiguration of the Caribbean," *Review of International Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 149–68 identifies hegemony as single state actors, the United States; Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders" leaves it open for non state hegemonies, the mode of production; Julian Saurin, "The Formation of Neo-Gramscians in International Relations and International Political Economy Neither Gramsci nor Marx," in *Gramsci, Political Economy, and International Relations Theory: Modern Princes and Naked Emperors*, ed. Alison J. Ayers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 27–51, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230616615_2 argues Gramsci's hegemony cannot explain IR.

[69] David Rear and Alan Jones, "Discursive Struggle and Contested Signifiers in the Arenas of Education Policy and Work Skills in Japan," *Critical Policy Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 380, https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2013.843469.

discourses.[70] This dislocation from discourse is disorienting, as it makes us question what we've relied on, and what we've always assumed to be true. It also presents us with agency, however, to choose between possible understandings, and to shift our discourses to account for new realities.[71] It is against these social antagonisms that hegemony strives, and through them that we can challenge the hegemony's monopoly over meaning. While this project first works to reconstruct the hegemonic meaning of embargo, it will also challenge it, and in doing so, challenge hegemony's political project. In other words, I will not be avoiding the social antagonism present in our understandings of embargo, and will instead be using it to imagine other worlds.

Self-location

Decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo (1993) asks the simple, but not uncomplicated, question "who is writing about what where and why?" encouraging us to examine our loci of enunciations before proceeding to do postcolonial discursive work.[72] He reminds us that the theorist is always necessarily located within their theory.[73] To locate myself in this project is to engage with the understanding of knowledge as situated, not as universal or as un-positioned. It is to recognize that the experiences of the thinker impact the thinking, that their own world views, social locations and discourses matter. In launching this theoretical examination using a discursive framework and a feminist praxis, my own discursive and social locations become increasingly important. Nothing and no one exists outside of discourse as Laclau and Mouffe understand it: I write, read, think and act

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[70] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 47.

[71] Howarth, *Discourse*, 109.

[72] Walter D. Mignolo, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse: Cultural Critique or Academic Colonialism?," *Latin American Review* 28, no. 3 (1993): 122.

[73] Mignolo, 128.

within the conditions of possibility determined by my operating discourse, just as you – the reader – will read, engage with, and understand this thesis through yours.

In entering an examination of the global practice of embargo, I chose therefore to interrogate my relation to embargo, and the project we call the Canadian state. This state is currently engaged in 20 economic sanction regimes internationally, the targets of which are all located in the geopolitical space we call the "global south" – perpetuating and reproducing relations of imperial control. How to view these non-Western countries is communicated to us from the state in a variety of rhetorics and discursive formations: I find traces of these messages in the associations I have hearing the names Baghdad, Kandahar, Damascus, through the voices of foreign correspondents, not as places you were "in," but as places you were "on the ground"; and the maps of travel safety for Canadian tourists, colour-coding countries by the kinds of violence that occurs there against certain kinds of bodies.[74] Canada is also a firm believer in free trade agreements, whose global interconnections of wealth and exploitation flow through the city I call home; the financial capital of the country, in the shadow of whose skyscrapers I learned to ride my bike. By birth and blood, I am a Canadian citizen, and by race, class, ability and presentation I am consistently unchallenged in that claim. To the extent to which the politics of embargo and the construction of state identities impacts peoples' capacities for mobility, I reflect on the ways I am granted unrestricted passage through these occupied lands, and on the weight that my Canadian passport holds in allowing me to cross international borders with ease.

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[74] Global Affairs Canada Government of Canada, "Travel Advice and Advisories," Travel.gc.ca, November 16, 2012, https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories.

Always through my movement and studies have I been an uninvited guest on stolen land. I am here because generations past came to this place in the search for new homes and riding the ships of British Imperialism. My understandings of the global have been shaped by my own spatiality, my socialization in a city of claimed multiculturalism which masks its systemic and systematic racism, in an inherited familial nostalgia which masks the violence of empire. The wealth and access of being a material beneficiary of global historical and ongoing networks of imperialism have unavoidably shaped the discursive frame through which my analysis is conducted. I cannot remove myself from the discussion of embargo, as the decisions regarding their imposition have been made by members of parliament whose authority comes from their claim to represent me, and the benefits of the system of embargo regimes directly impact the prosperity (by some measures) of my country.

Ann Stoler and Walter Mignolo[75] highlight the importance of being reflexive on the selection of topics that get animated for study, and the objects of study that get deemed relevant. In reflecting on my location in this work, I also reflect on why I chose to study embargo. The first time I encountered the face of embargo was in a study of revolutionary Latin American feminisms when I was 17 years old. I met embargo through the Cuban experience of American sanctions, in the context of American anti-communist counter-revolutionary intervention. It did not surprise me, therefore, that in this feminist literature, the Cuban embargo was situated in connection to processes of American imperialism, international interference, and a very specific political anti-leftist agenda. It was later in studies of IR theory in university that I encountered the image of embargo as

[75] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 15. Mignolo, "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse," 122.

a nonviolent non-invasive preventative measure of international diplomacy, and was shocked to find it dominant in the IR academic conversations. Where the violence seemed so obvious to me, in my discursive framing, it was unseeable by these theoretical standards. This was my moment of dislocation, of social antagonism: the discourse by which I was learning to see and interpret the world, that of IR theory, was failing to confer meaning onto an experience, onto embargo, and I became aware of its contingency. For me, therefore, this is also a political project. Neutralized power is harder to fight, and naturalized power is harder to see for those not experiencing its effects. By deconstructing both, and removing the inertia of necessity behind current structures of global violence, the fight against sedimented hegemonies becomes more possible. Insofar as I am implicated in those structures of power, so too must I be implicated in their resistance, and the creation of a new condition of possibility for a more just global order. This project may be a small piece of imagining that another world is possible.

Establishing terms

The study of discourse in this thesis is situated in the case study of embargo, and uses a qualitative discourse analysis and reviews of academic literatures, mainly in International Relations. When discussing economic statecraft, there are many terms used that are related to embargo: boycott, trade blockade, siege, economic sanctions, targeted sanctions, smart sanctions. The intricacies and distinctions between these state mechanisms are not of central concern in this thesis, and so, despite their differences, the terms embargo and sanctions are used fairly interchangeably. I make the choice to not differentiate because it is not the specificity of the embargo or sanction regime that concerns this paper, but rather its logic. Whereas embargo requires ceasing all forms of

trade and communication, and sanctions refer to shutting down certain mechanisms of trade while others remain open, these practices are connected by the manipulation of international connectivity to influence domestic action. The uniting thread of these practices of international economic policy is what I identify as the logic of embargo: *the interruption of regularized or normalized international connection by a state – be that trade, communication, mobility or access – for the purposes of altering the behavior of the target country*.[76] Some scholars remove sanction regimes from study that are purely punitive in their orientation, when they express no explicit attempt to alter the target's behavior.[77] An understanding of disciplinary power, however, shows that punishment can play the role of behavioral modification as well: it demonstrates to the state and others the cost of not conforming to international, or American, standards and therefore shapes their behavior moving forward. I will not, therefore, be drawing this distinction, and will be relying on the generalized logic.

Chapter sketch

Chapter one argues that (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism together form a discursively hegemonic understanding of embargo as nonviolent, and affirm and (re)produce that understanding through the enforced closure of the nodal points security and violence. The chapter asks: Who are the knowers and what is knowable? In the limited terms of debate that are established as the totality, what is seeable and what is unseeable? It establishes what has been the dominant understanding of the practice of economic sanctions in international relations theory through the lens of the discourse – that embargo and economic sanctions are nonviolent alternatives to warfare. Through an analysis of the

[76] For a full analysis of definitions of embargo, see Chapter 1.

[77] Chan and Drury, "Sanctions as Economic Statecraft," 2000, 2.

dominant IR literature on the topic, it demonstrates two things: firstly, it shows how, through the establishment of differential positions, and the hegemonic closure of the networked concepts of embargo and security, violence, and statehood, embargo has been established and re-inscribed as nonviolent, making unseeable and unknowable any form of violence; and secondly, it interrogates the political purpose of this construction, and the enforced limits on the debate in dominant theory, questioning how it makes use of the invisibility of violence. What does this debate, set up by narrow terms, legitimize, make possible, make seeable, and what – and who – does it marginalize?

Chapter two argues that feminist approaches to IR make possible a different understanding of embargo by renegotiating the meaning of the discursive nodal points security and violence. Having established that the assumptions underlying the dominant view of embargo are contingent, a discursive formation, this chapter explores an alternative formation that results in a different understanding of embargo. Using the discursive tools of experience and equivalence, feminists contest the singularity of violence and security. By employing the re-conceptualizations of structural violence and human security, the relational meaning of embargo is altered; nonviolence becomes an impossibility in this construction, and the professed singularity of hegemonic theory is undermined. An understanding of structural violence makes illegitimate the discursive move to divide military and economic forces, and an understanding of human security looks at security as a matter of individual and community lives rather than a feature of the abstract state. Using the re-conceptions of structural violence and human security therefore allows us to see the violence of embargo. This chapter additionally analyzes the

literature that comes from this feminist theoretical perspective, and its political projects and implications.

Chapter three follows through the door that chapter two has opened. No longer accepting the terms of the debate established by dominant theory, this chapter pushes for radical contextualization. Situating embargo in its global and historical context, this chapter argues that the practice is a tool of empire. Embargo, in this view, is seen as a tool for international discipline, policing the shape of the imperial world order to protect the interests of Western powers and punish deviance. It also upholds and reproduces racist and colonial state identity formations by which the Global South is positioned in submission. It relies on and attaches material consequence to gendered and colonial scripts of "hero" and "rogue." This chapter's proposal – embargo-as-imperial – emerges from the discursive and deconstructive methodology taken up by this thesis, and acts as an invitation to the reader to probe our assumptions for their political function and impact, as well as to open the door for more critical and contextual understandings of world politics.

Chapter One: Embargo-as-nonviolent

The dominant theoretical construction in IR imagines embargo as a nonviolent international practice, but it rarely says so. Instead, embargo is established as nonviolent through inference and assumption, exclusion and metaphor, all the building blocks of a discursive formation. Despite not explicitly stating its nonviolence, the supremacy of this image shapes how it can be used, critiqued and acted towards – in other words, its conditions of possibility; that which is considered possible under its discursive construction. The subtle power of hegemony lies in its unspoken boundaries, the unquestioned necessities, and the quiet exclusion of possibility, and sayability. This chapter seeks to pull back the layers of naturalization and assumption, to bring to light and interrogate hegemony's political project. There are two discursive ways by which the identity of nonviolence is conferred onto the concept of embargo. The first is through a process of definition by differentiation, and is found in textbook articulations and legal classifications of the practice. Ambiguity about the identity of embargo persists in these definitions, however. The second mechanism at work is a project of hegemonic closure, whereby the stable nodal points of security and violence are enforced, necessitating the identity of embargo-as-nonviolent. This chapter outlines each of these processes in turn, de- and re-constructing the dominant discursive formation. After arguing that the understanding of embargo is a specificity and not a singularity – *an* understanding, not *the only* understanding – this chapter closes by interrogating what the purpose of maintaining this image of embargo might be, what work it does and which political ends it serves.

Definition by differentiation

In textbooks, the practice of embargo is dominantly, and simultaneously implicitly, understood as nonviolent. Embargo is most often described as a mechanism of "economic statecraft,"[78] or under the opaque label of "economic coercion."[79] For example, textbooks define the practice of sanctions as: "deliberate interference with the economy of another state in order to coercively enforce its compliance"[80]; "agreements among other states to stop trading with the violator or to stop some particular commodity trade (most often military goods) as punishment for its violation,"[81]; "a foreign policy tool used by a country or international organization, such as the United Nations, to punish or persuade another country into action."[82] These textbooks tend to use the terms "embargo" and "sanctions" interchangeably, rarely focusing on the distinctions between them. In international law, the practice of embargo is codified in Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, which states that: Members of the United Nations may be called upon to apply "complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations."[83] While the terminology of "embargo" or "sanction" is not directly employed in the UN Charter, this article defines the admissibility of the practice. The common

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[78] Norrin M. Ripsman and T. V. Paul, *Globalization and the National Security State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40; Also seen in O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*; Steve Chan and A. Cooper Drury, eds., *Sanctions as Economic Statecraft: Theory and Practice*, International Political Economy Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596979_1.

[79] Michael Sheehan, *International Security: An Analytical Survey* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 68; O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, 3; Lisa L. Martin, *Coercive Cooperation: Explaining Multilateral Economic Sanctions* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

[80] Sheehan, *International Security*, 68.

[81] Joshua S. Goldstein, Sandra Whitworth, and Jon C. Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 2nd Canadian ed (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2008), 278.

[82] Heitkamp, *Economic Sanctions*, 12.

[83] U.N. Charter art. 41, para. 1.

thread among these definitions is the logic of embargo, which employs isolation strategically to influence state behavior. It is for this reason that I have built the working definition of the practice: the interruption of regularized or normalized international connection – be that trade, communication, mobility or access – for the purposes of altering the behavior of the target country.

Definitions in textbooks tend to be short, and perfunctory. The framing of the practice comes from the outlined purposes of its implementation, rather than a discussion of its effects. Textbooks link the implementation economic sanctions to various goals of multi-lateral governance, especially to the enforcement of international law and the promotion of human rights.[84] In these roles it functions as a preventative strategy, threatened as a mechanism to enforce compliance, as well as a punitive strategy, representing the consequence of diverting from international norms of behavior. Williams (2008), for instance, links sanctions to witnessing, denouncing and shaming as means for the international community to express its opposition to genocidal regimes, and the Global Viewpoints textbook highlights the use of sanctions as a response to terrorism.[85] UN Article 41 quoted above is found in Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which is responsible for "Action with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression."[86] Sanctions are situated by these framings as non-military interventions for global governance. Insofar as classical IR theory exhibits a profound preoccupation with

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[84] Sheehan, *International Security*, 68; Ripsman and Paul, *Globalization and the National Security State*, 40; Goldstein, Whitworth, and Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 278.

[85] Paul D. Williams, ed., *Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 195; Heitkamp, *Economic Sanctions*. It is worth noting that both the justifications of "genocide" and "terrorism" rely on a shared moral stance to grant the practice international legitimacy, without problematizing the imperialist and racialized logics that designate terrorism and justify human rights interventions. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

[86] U.N. Charter art. 41, para. 1.

the problem of anarchy in the international sphere, these potential solutions are centered with considerable weight.[87]

Throughout this discussion, the practice of embargo is rarely explicitly described as nonviolent.[88] More often, we can see in these definitions that embargo is laid out in neutral terms, without reference to violence at all. To understand how the practice is constructed in relation to violence, I start by drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of meaning fixation.[89] As outlined in the Introduction, Laclau and Mouffe argue that words and practices are not inherently meaningful. Rather, they are imbued with meaning through social processes; the process of articulation and the (temporary) fixation of the practice into a discursive formation. This is how we can see that meaning is always both contingent and relational. Relationality, Laclau and Mouffe argue, is always established through the identification of difference. The articulation of an element into a moment happens by establishing "differential positions" between the element and its discursive network.[90] The identity of a sign is determined by comparison to that from which it is different. Or, as they simplify later, "to be something is always not to be something else."[91] The establishment of the identity of embargo can therefore be seen through the analysis of that from which it is differentiated.

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[87] Argued for example by the neo-neo synthesis, see: Ole Waever, "The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate.," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[88] Unless highlighting its construction for the purposes of critique: Barash & Webel (2009, p.335) were the only textbook reviewed to state that sanctions were considered nonviolent coercion, as well as being the only textbook to raise structural violence concerns of the economic mechanism. For more on structural violence see, Chapter 2.

[89] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

[90] Laclau and Mouffe, 91.

[91] Laclau and Mouffe, 115.

To understand the meaning which is conferred onto the practice of embargo, therefore, means to understand the networked relations of difference set up by the literature. In descriptions of the conditions of its use, the literature of embargo creates a differentiation between imposing embargo and the use of force. Morgan and Schwebach's work (1997), for example, studies how sanctions change target country behaviors *without* resorting to force,[92] and Heitkamp (2019) refers to sanctions as a "precursor or placeholder until more punitive action is taken, such as war."[93] These articulations of embargo as something that happens before or instead of violence, the use of force, and war, distinguish embargo from all three, and convey onto embargo the identity of *non*-force and *non*-violence. In these articulations, there is no room for equivalence between embargo and war, nor is there a need to define war or force in these contexts; their identities are stable and assumed as military and violent. Embargo's identity of nonviolence then becomes affixed through its relation to the concepts of war and force.

The same differentiation can be seen in the UN's legal definition. The actions laid out under Article 41 are directly described as measures "not involving the use of armed force."[94] By differentiation, these means of economic interruption are here legally distinguished from violence. They are further differentiated from the inscription of "violent" by Article 42, which states that: "Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate," the UN Security Council can authorize the use of such actions as "demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of

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[92] As cited in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford Handbooks of Political Science (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 492.

[93] Heitkamp, *Economic Sanctions*, 12.

[94] U.N. Charter art. 41, para. 1.

the United Nations."[95] Despite being defined in the chapter of the charter that governs the use of force, embargo and sanction are set in contradiction to force, which is inscribed as military by the usage of the descriptors "air, sea or land." Just as in the academic literature, nowhere does it state that embargo is a nonviolent mechanism, but by its relation to military force, its identity of nonviolence is assigned.

Persistent ambiguity

The language and arrangement of the UN Charter is inherited from the Covenant of the League of Nations, the United Nation's precursor. With relation to embargo – or boycott in its language – the Covenant states that "should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants" all other members of the league would be authorized to

> subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial, or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State.[96]

These "financial and economic measures," are established in contrast to "effective military, naval, or air force" and "armed forces."[97] The legacy of this definition is clearly visible in the United Nations' articulation.

In Wilson's explanation of boycott, however, we have begun to see the deeply set ambiguity associated with the practice of embargo. His descriptions of boycott evoke a violence that his definition immediately dismisses. He calls it "more tremendous than war,"[98] "a terrible remedy," and states that, "a nation that is boycotted is a nation that is

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[95] U.N. Charter art. 42, para. 1. http://legal.un.org/repertory/art42.shtml

[96] Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, in Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations*, 261.

[97] Wilson, 261.

[98] Wilson, 66.

in sight of surrender."[99] He compares boycott to strangulation, stating that a full boycott "brings a nation to its sense just as suffocation removes from the individual all inclinations to fight," while continuing to assert that boycott is a substitute, not an equivalent, of war.[100] In fact, in Wilson's estimation, it is boycott that will ensure a lasting peace. The complete isolation from the international community brought about by a boycott would bring a country to its knees, eliminating its threat to the community while deterring such an offence in the future, and thus – he argues – preventing further global conflict. To be useful for peace, boycott must be entirely destructive.

This paradox is brought into full light by Wilson's grim and ambitious statement which we saw at the start: "Apply this economic, peaceful, silent, deadly remedy and there will be no need for force."[101] Constructed as equal parts deadly and peaceful, boycott continues to be defined in contrast to force. A similar dissonance arises trying to reconcile the definition of embargo as differentiated from the use of force, while being defined in the UN Charter chapter which governs the use of force. To understand this persistent ambiguity, we cannot rely solely on the understanding of definition through differentiation. We need to understand the process of hegemonic meaning fixation through networked articulation.

Hegemonic closure

As discussed before, hegemony is understood by Laclau and Mouffe as seeking to assert singularity out of multiplicity, and create universal applicability out of specificity. It centers the fixation of a single meaning to the marginalization of all alternatives,

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[99] Wilson, 71.

[100] Wilson, 71.

[101] Wilson, 71.

asserting unambiguity through forceful closure.[102] It is a political type of relation, a form of particularly powerful articulation.[103] Hegemony works to marginalize the field of discursivity attached to all networks of meaning, and seeks the achievement of common-sense, of the complete naturalization of a single meaning.[104] Like all articulation, it does this through a process of setting up relations between elements, such that they occupy differential positions.[105] Hegemonic relations rely especially on the enforced closure of floating signifiers, and fixes them in relation to nodal points, to the relatively stable signs around which elements organize themselves. By asserting the singularity in these master signs, hegemonic processes can fix meaning for an entire network of associated elements.

Unravelling hegemonic meaning articulations means trying to trace relational meaning networks back to their nodal points, like untangling a mess of yarn by following a single thread back to the knot. Wilson relates embargo to the achievement of peace. Embargo, therefore, is understood relationally to the concept of peace. Peace, in his work, is established as the persistent absence of war. What then is "war"? He does not define it in his work, assuming the stability of its meaning in his discourse, and the discourse of his readers. It is however differentiated from merely causing death, since the concepts of peaceful and deadly are able to coexist. Instead, war is more closely related to the broader concept of security. Both war and security derive their meaning from a shared understanding of statehood, since war is a characteristic of states alone. Violence in the

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[102] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 48.

[103] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 125.

[104] We know that meaning is always contingent and partial, and that singularity can never be fully fixed. In fact, Laclau and Mouffe argue that hegemony requires there be contestation of meaning for hegemonic articulation to take place: in a discourse of fully fixed meanings, there would be no hegemonic process as there would be no struggle for meaning (1985, p.97). Hegemony is visible in the struggle for meaning fixation, therefore, not as a status to be reached.

[105] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 91.

IR discourse is also relationally connected in this network, the limits of its relevance determined by the stable meanings of state, security and war. For the deconstruction of this tangled network, I have pulled out security as a discursive nodal point, around which the meaning of violence and war are organized, and by which the impacts of embargo are excluded from relevance.[106]

The meaning of security in IR

In the paradox of hegemony, the concept of security is both singly defined and essentially contested.[107] On the one hand, there is a prevailing recognition that different people mean different things when they use the term security; while, at the same time, the dominant IR discourse easily relies on an assumed, undefined, singularity of meaning. Laclau and Mouffe refer to paradoxes as the manifestation of the "presence of the contingent in the necessary," and note that hegemony relies on ambiguity as a playing field in which to assert its dominance.[108] It is upon contested meanings that hegemony seeks to fix singularity, fighting to tie a floating signifier to a stable nodal point.[109] We can understand the hegemonic articulation of security, therefore, as inherent contingency masquerading as necessity; despite its contestation from external discourses, the discourse of dominant IR theory entertains only one definition of security, relationally

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[106] The designation of security as a nodal point, rather than sovereignty, state or any other sign is fairly arbitrary. Nodal points are designed as a way of understanding a process, not as an *a priori* existing phenomenon.

[107] See: Steve Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security," in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. Ken Booth, Critical Security Studies (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005); Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 25th anniversary (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2016).

[108] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 100. "Only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps – which implies a constant redefinition of the latter – is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic." (p. 122)

[109] Rear and Jones, "Discursive Struggle and Contested Signifiers in the Arenas of Education Policy and Work Skills in Japan," 380.

defined by the meaning of the state, and defining in turn the state-centric meanings of war and violence.

In the case of the dominant theoretical discourse in IR, which defines the terms and ontologies of neo-realism and neo-liberalism, the identity of security is centered on the state. Security is dominantly understood, as the "security of the state against external dangers, which [is] to be achieved by increasing military capabilities."[110] Similarly, war is understood as "large-scale, organized, and reciprocal violence compressed in time and space."[111] While much contested by critical theory, a state-centric ontology of security runs throughout those theories that make up IR cannon. As Steve Smith (2004) puts it, International Relations, as a field of study, "has almost been defined by its worship of the state-as-actor," and has, he argues, produced a marginalization of other actors and referent objects.[112] This common conception of security must therefore be traced back to a Weberian definition of the state, wherein a state's sovereignty is defined by its ability to monopolize legitimate use of force within its territorial boundaries.[113] A failure of a state to secure its borders would represent a failure of its sovereignty, and a failure to exert statehood. Thus, a military threat to the territorial borders of a state has become privileged as the central security concern; such a threat is existential, it threatens the very

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[110] As formulated by J. Ann Tickner, "Re-Visioning Security," in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 176. More feminist understandings of security to follow, see Chapter 2.

[111] Tarak Barkawi, "Decolonising War," *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 2 (July 2016): 201, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2016.7. Barkawi bases his definition of war on international law, the Oxford dictionary and its use in the literature. He contrasts the dichotomy of war/peace from the perspective of the colonization, whereby there was sustained large-scale organized violence for centuries.

[112] Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2004): 505.

[113] The state was notably defined in this way in Max Weber's 1919 speech, "Politics as Vocation": Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters, *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society : New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

existence of the state *as a state* – not the people within it, but its definitional construct. Security as military protection of territorial borders has come to be the "common-sense" understanding of security for classical IR theory. (Neo)realist and (neo)liberal approaches to questions of security may differ in many ways, but their conception of its meaning is founded on those shared assumptions.

International Relations has a disciplinary tradition of describing its evolution through Great Debates, positioning its development along imposing and antagonistic lines. This foundational myth, as Miles Kahler (1977) describes it, sets up a structure whereby there can be winners and losers, and the discipline fights its way to progress.[114] Despite the polar opposition established by this framing, a hegemonic conception of security overarches the divide – a singularity which through its dispersion and repetition assumes the representation of a universality. The first of the "Great Debates" occurred between realism and liberalism, often termed "idealism" by its opponents. These frameworks disagree about the characteristics of human nature, but maintain the same definition of territorial sovereignty and security. Classical realists like Hans Morgenthau (1948), who thought in terms of the irreducible question of power, apply their conception of Hobbesian human nature to the international scene.[115] Creating a parallel between man and the state, they assume states will seek to enhance and preserve their power at any cost

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[114] Miles Kahler, "Inventing International Relations: International Relations After 1945," in *New Thinking in International Relations*, ed. Michael W. Doyle and G. John Ikenberry (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 21–22. This format of disciplinary history also occludes that which is silenced by IR; race and its long history of imperialism. Mariam Georgis and Nicole V. T. Lugosi, "(Re)Inserting Race and Indigeneity in International Relations Theory: A Post-Colonial Approach," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 71–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2014.867845.

[115] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948). Feminists critique the version of humanity described by Hobbes as deriving from extreme masculinized assumptions, see for example: J. Ann Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," *Millennium* 17, no. 3 (1988): 432; Eric M. Blanchard, "Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 4 (June 1, 2003): 1293, https://doi.org/10.1086/368328.

in order to secure their survival. States must accumulate sufficient military power in order to protect against this inevitability, and ensure their security.[116] Classical liberal institutionalists like Wilson, as cited above, would disagree with the characterization of human nature, repudiating the assumption that "bad faith is the accepted rule," and arguing instead a common commitment to peace among nations.[117] This framework continues to characterize security in relation to military power and territoriality, but argues that institutions can play a mediating role to prevent war. They reify preventing the violation of territorial sovereignty as the objective of security, while positioning state-led international institutions in a role to achieve security for all nations.

The newer iterations of these theoretical frameworks reproduce a similar dynamic: they build on shared ontologies and conceptualizations while disagreeing on the conclusions. Neo-realism reaches the same conclusion as classical realism, that self-preservation for states requires the accumulation of military might. This framework comes to this conclusion through different analysis, focusing on system-level explanations of international phenomena, and prioritizing the condition of anarchy, instead of human nature, as the central determinant of the security dilemma: there is no global government to create and enforce laws and regulations that prevent any state from infringing on the territorial sovereignty of any other, and therefore preparation for war is necessary for survival.[118] This system-level analysis responded in some ways to a desire in the

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[116] K. M. Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, Second edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 19.

[117] Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations*, 66. See also: Anne-Marie Slaughter Burley, "International Law and International Relations Theory: A Dual Agenda," in *The Nature of International Law* (London: Routledge, 2001); Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, "The Promise of Institutionalist Theory," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 39–51, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539214.

[118] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979).

discipline to prove its scientific legitimacy, creating generalizable laws under a governing positivist logic.[119] Neo-liberalism, like its classical predecessor, disagrees about the preventability of war. It proposes complex interdependence is a mechanism by which that economic relations can insure peace, by increasing the cost of war and creating conditions for shared interests.[120] Neo-liberalism also faced the disciplinary pressures for scientification, and responded to the structure of the neo-realist argument. It contends that even within a condition of anarchy, and a priority of self-help, the security dilemma can be avoided through a focus on absolute – rather than relative – gains, which encourages more cooperation.[121] By adopting the terms and logic of anarchic systems, neo-liberalism became subsumed by the state-centric focus of their counterparts, becoming, in Kahler's words, "Tweedledee" to neo-realism's "Tweedledum."[122] While the two frameworks disagree on the possibility of international cooperation, that which constitutes a threat to security remains the same for each: military threat to territorial boundaries, and the existential survival of the state as a unit. We see, then, the re-inscription of the hegemonic security definition through the veil of antagonism.

An illustrative example of the enforcement of state-centric boundaries onto the discipline comes from Kenneth Waltz's structure of the three images of international relations, whereby the limits of relevance for international relations are purposefully

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[119] Kahler, "Inventing International Relations: International Relations After 1945," 35; For more on the impact of positivism on IR, see Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence." Feminists disagree with the prioritization of objectivity for authority, and argue that it has been used as a category to exclude women from places of power (relying on the gendered objective/subjective binary). See: Mary Hawkesworth, *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation* (New Brunwick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation."

[120] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

[121] Keohane and Martin, "The Promise of Institutionalist Theory."

[122] Kahler, "Inventing International Relations: International Relations After 1945," 38.

constructed to marginalize any consideration of individual or community suffering or agency from the concern of international politics.[123] Waltz laid out his theory in his first book, *Man, the State and War* (1959), where he argues three levels of war causation: the first locates the cause of war in individuals, and aggressive human nature; the second, in relationships between states and the specificities of those states, their internal structure, for example; and thirdly, in the structure of the international system, and the fact that without an international government, states exist in an international condition of anarchy.[124] As his analysis developed, however, he began to discard the first two images for a prevailing third image theoretical explanation. In *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Waltz developed his structural realism which privileges the organizing structure of anarchy as the determining factor of war or peace, and forcibly eliminated any other explanation.[125] Through this, he constructed and enforced a distinct divide between the features of national politics, and features relevant to international politics – where concerns of individuals and communities were relegated to other disciplines and excluded from consideration of international politics. Waltz's theory also normalizes a scientific standard for analysis. To be considered valid in international relations, theory needed to be generalizable and universal, aligning international relations with many other social sciences in an attempt to achieve the legitimacy and authority provided by claims to science and objectivity. These two moves to set the boundaries of the discipline impacted what became possible for theorization, and what made up the condition of possibility in

[123] Although Waltz is himself a neo-realist, this is an influential work for the discipline as a whole. Kahler argues that *Theory of International Politics* sparked generational interest in neo-realism (1977, 35), and, despite the existence of these debates and others, "Realism remains the intellectual password into the corridors of power." (Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 19.)

[124] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

[125] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

IR. The dominance of Waltz's third image in neo-realism and neo-liberalism shows the way that state-centric boundaries that became the norm in IR, and the ways that relevance was policed and enforced throughout the discipline.[126]

The impossibility of "violence"

The prioritization of state security for disciplinary concern marginalizes other violences in discussions of International Relations. The shared definition of security that emerges from the dominant theory principally conceptualizes violence in relation to the state. As Smith put it, "the form of violence defined as most central to International Relations is violence caused by military conflict."[127] Direct military conflict is the central way in which violence can be seen in IR, and therefore economic mechanisms are excluded. Relying on the military/economic dichotomy established in the discourse, embargo is separated from its violence by its association with the non-military. When embargo is described as a means of coercion, it is prefaced with the modifier "economic."[128] Embargo does not constitute a threat to security, since it does not involve boots on the ground, a military show of force or threat to territorial sovereignty. It cannot therefore, in the terms of the discourse, be violent. The death that Wilson acknowledges is caused by embargo does not threaten the practice's status as peaceful, since that kind of death is not understood as violence on the international scene.

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[126] I do not mean to suggest by this analysis that these are uncontested assertions, merely that they are dominant in a specific discursive formation. Feminist scholars have problematized objectivity as a masculinized trait, state-centrism for exacerbating the public/private divide, both of which have excluded women from spaces of IR. They have pushed and redefined the field in significant ways which will be explored in Chapter 2.

[127] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 506.

[128] See for example Chan and Drury, "Sanctions as Economic Statecraft," 2000, 3; Miroslav Nincic and Peter Wallensteen, eds., *Dilemmas of Economic Coercion: Sanctions in World Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

The dominant construction of embargo does not understand harm to the target state in terms of the deaths inflicted, since they are excluded from relevance. Rather, harm is only conceptualized in terms of its position in the international community, and its ability to conduct its affairs internationally. As one description put it, "Over time, a sanctioned state can become a *pariah* in a community of nations, cut off from normal relations with others."[129] Constituting a "pariah state" in the globalized networked economy of the international community can be a devastating thing, devastating enough that its threat could alter a country's behaviour. This harm however cannot be conceptualized as violence in the hegemonic formation, since it is neither military nor territorial. When the nodal point of security is fixed with a stable state-centric meaning, that meaning flows throughout the network, impacting the condition of possibility for related terms like war, violence, and eventually, embargo. All alternative meanings of embargo are marginalized and dismissed through this relational closure. This means, in the end, that Wilson's boycott is able to be both deadly and peaceful without contradiction.

The UN Charter provides a particularly illustrative example of the distinction. As we have seen, the practice of embargo is legitimated in opposition to the use of military force, but Article 42 outlines blockade as among the possible uses of force.[130] What is it that differentiates embargo from blockade, such that one is considered a military operation and the other a *non*-violent, non-interventionist, non-forceful mechanism? Each uses a limitation on inflow of goods to influence a target country, each manipulates the ability of that country to participate in the international community and globalized flow

[129] Goldstein, Whitworth, and Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 278. Emphasis in original. More on the discursive impacts of the creation of a pariah state in Chapter 3.

[130] U.N. Charter art. 42, para. 1.

of trade. Each is instituted in response to an action deemed unacceptable, and is removed upon its correction, and each can be implemented in coordination with other mechanisms of coercion. The main distinguishing difference is that a blockade is established by military personnel along the borders of the targeted country. Boots on the ground, and a threat to territorial borders mean that blockade constitutes a use of force. Embargo, on the other hand, achieves the same goals as a blockade and would have comparable impacts, but because it does not involve physical troops. It therefore cannot constitute a military operation, cannot be thought of in terms of security, and its violence cannot be seen. As Smith puts it: "while death in state-to-state armed conflict is part of International Relations, death by economics, or by the market is not."[131] In this way, closure is enforced on the concept of embargo through the reproduction, and continual reassertion of the definition of security. Without those markers, within this discursive formation, the violence of embargo becomes an impossibility.

The dominant literature on embargo

The state-centric, hegemonic formations of security and violence, by reinforcing the boundaries of relevance to IR discourse, have determined what is debatable about the practice of embargo. Instead of opening inquiries about the impacts of sanction regimes, the motivating question in the mainstream literature is about the effectiveness of the practice in achieving the state's goals. A practically oriented question, it serves policy makers to guide their choices about how and where to implement sanctions, allowing them to ignore with impunity the human cost of their choices. As discussed previously, embargo was rarely seen as effective in policy or theory prior to the 1990s, with only a

[131] Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence," 505.

few cases of its implementation. Two major factors are identified as contributing to the changing perception of embargo's utility, along with the end of the era of bi-polarity and the increased globalization and interconnectedness of national economies. The fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa was widely seen as proof of the potential of economic sanctions to achieve results, despite initial resistance from global powers to engage.[132] Around the same time, the first large scale study of the effectiveness of economic sanctions was released, granting scientific authority to the question – an important factor in a discipline that values positivist logic so highly. The work by Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott, known as the HSE database, found that American sanctions successfully achieved their policy goals in 34% of cases, a much higher success rate than previously assumed.[133] These combined proofs that embargo could be successful policy tool are argued to have contributed to making it a viable option for foreign policy, and unilateral and multilateral sanctions correspondingly increased dramatically in the 1990s.

An intellectual debate emerged around this time, about how to best interpret these claims to success, and the overall effectiveness of the practice of sanctions. In the same year that the HSE database was released, David Baldwin (1985) published his work on economic statecraft, urging the reassessment of embargo and sanctions as a powerful tool for international relations.[134] He relies on the HSE database to highlight the potential in the practice for effective and nonviolent economic statecraft. Similarly, Elizabeth Rogers (1996) argued for a cost-benefit analysis of the practice of embargo, finding that the risks

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[132] The effect of the South Africa sanctions on the perception of sanction effectiveness is argued in Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 71.

[133] Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007). The impact of this database on the usage of sanctions internationally is argued in Robert A. Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 92, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539368.

[134] David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1985).

are low for the issuing country and so the tool should be used liberally, putting it in contrast to the costs and risks of military engagements.[135] The less optimistic perspective on the potential of sanctions emerged in the 1990s as well, not in response to the impacts on the ground as some humanitarian organizations and NGOs were beginning to highlight, but rather to a profound skepticism that an economic tool could ever have influence over military priorities. This perspective, most notably captured by Robert Pape (1997), argued that the effectiveness of sanctions was being overblown, and the empirical evidence misinterpreted.[136] He provides a reinterpretation of the HSE database, in which he argues that the 34% of successful sanctions is misrepresentative, and in fact only 4% of sanctions had *independent* effects on the target country's policy.[137] Pape relies strictly on a measure of compliance for success, whereas Baldwin integrates other factors such as cost-infliction for non-compliance as well as a gradation of success.[138] Other considerations for determining success have also been suggested, such as the symbolic role of sanctions. Drury (2000), for example, advocates for consideration of domestic and international political factors in understanding the motivations of sanction regimes, which allows for less stringent conditions for success,[139] and Kaempfer and Lowenberg (2007)

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[135] Elizabeth S. Rogers, "Using Economic Sanctions to Control Regional Conflicts," *Security Studies* 5, no. 4 (June 1, 1996): 45. Her work helps to explain how a 34% success rate was seen as validating for the practice of embargo: even if over half of sanction regimes did not achieve their intended results, the practice has so little impact on the issuing country that it was seen as worth trying first, before moving to other options such as military engagement.

[136] Pape, "Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work."

[137] He argues only 4 out of the 115 American Sanction regimes can be considered successful, using the criteria of compliance to policy demands. Pape, 98–106.

[138] David A. Baldwin and Robert A. Pape, "Evaluating Economic Sanctions," *International Security* 23, no. 2 (1998): 193, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539384.

[139] A. Cooper Drury, "How and Whom the US President Sanctions: A Time-Series Cross-Section Analysis of US Sanction Decisions and Characteristics," in *Sanctions as Economic Statecraft: Theory and Practice*, ed. Steve Chan and A. Cooper Drury, International Political Economy Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 19, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596979_2.

assert "expressive or demonstrative purposes" for the implementation of sanctions.[140] Since the shift towards regimes of "targeted" or "smart" sanctions, these definitions of success have shifted again, to encompass ideas of surgical strikes, and low-risk high-reward interventions. Presently, the conversation has focused on optimization, and on determining when sanctions can be effective at their goals, under which conditions and with which contributing factors.[141]

The dominant position on the question of effectiveness can be seen in this analysis to shift based on international realities, while at the same time impacting international behaviors: the perceived success of embargo regimes leads to theories of effectiveness, and the understanding of embargos as effective has justified and popularized the use of the tool. The interplay between theory and practice here demonstrated is an illustration of the materiality of Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of discourse. The implementation and success of a regime can only be understood through the discursively constructed filters of that which characterizes "success." The definition in law constructs the condition of possibility for the practice of international embargo and the very physical material process of enacting and enforcing a sanction, as well as fixing the meanings through which its impacts are read and understood. And, as we will see later in Chapters 2 and 3, the practice of embargo relies on and shapes international power hierarchies, and (re)produces the rules of who can legitimately behave in certain ways. In this way, the discourse of embargo is very real and material, and it is for this reason that our theoretical constructions of concepts matter. How we understand phenomena impacts how we act

[140] Kaempfer and Lowenberg, "Chapter 27 The Political Economy of Economic Sanctions."

[141] For example, see Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions*.

towards them, and when our constructions write violence out of the picture, the theory is complicit in its perpetuation.

Much like the Great Debate between neo-liberalism and neo-realism which is rooted in the same state-centric ontology, these opposing theories of embargo's effectiveness are positioned at either end of a very limited spectrum. They share far more than they disagree on, despite purporting to be complete inverses. Each maintains the same definition of sanction regimes, and as we have seen, the same framing of sanctions as nonviolent, non-invasive methods of coercion. Despite differences in the framing of success, these theories share the same overarching goal: sanctions are for behavior modification of another state, whether directly or indirectly. The state-centrism of hegemonic definitions of security and sovereignty is enforced on this debate, and is reproduced by its assuming the range of a totality. By asserting these very similar positions as polar oppositions engaged in a great debate, the boundaries of the field are defined and the terms of the debate are strictly limited. It makes unaskable and unseeable violence at the level of community or individual, or the impact of sanctions on target countries' populations. As Buck, Gallant and Nossal (1998) put it:

> For while sanctions have a well-deserved reputation for 'not working' – when 'working' is defined as producing change in the behavior of governments – in fact sanctions work only too well if 'working' is defined in other ways. International economic sanctions work very well at disrupting normal patterns of economic intercourse; they distort the economic lives of communities, [and] cause shortages of supply in essential goods."[142]

This contradicting image of embargo's work will be explored at length in the next chapter, as it challenges and pushes the boundaries of legitimate inquiry established by dominant IR. Limitations on relevance and the disciplining of the discourse have

[142] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 75–76.

legitimized questions of "success," while excluding all other questions of the impacts of the practice.

Interrogating political consequences

The enforced closure on the limits of "seeablity" is a political project, undertaken by those in the positions of power, speaking from specific localities. It makes possible some actions while making un-considerable others. It legitimizes and even acclaims some policy projects with the esteemed marker of "peace," while others are made impossible and unthinkable. The limited discursive field of debate in the literature is both a result of, and reinforces, categories of relevance determined by IR's western hegemonic conceptualizations, and naturalizes questions of policy effectiveness while side-lining questions of impact. Jørgensen argues that this is at the heart of hegemonic processes; hegemony mediates the transition from the political, contingent, and debatable to the objective, naturalized fact.[143] Naturalization is itself political, serving some interests over others, and making unaskable the concerns of some. As Cox put it, "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose."[144] We must, therefore, interrogate the political consequences and implications of the prioritized way of knowing. Stoler challenges us to question the authority of disciplinary boundaries, and to "pause in the face of how we read for 'relevance.'"[145] Easy reliance on ready-made analytical frames and pre-fab concepts results in unremarked occlusions and omissions, and serves to reproduce and recreate a specific status quo. The conceptual grammars upon which we rely, the work we

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[143] Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 36.

[144] Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders," 128. This point is similarly argued by Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism: Feminist Subversions of IR Theory," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 16, no. 1 (1991): 71.

[145] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 24.

do with concepts and the work concepts do to us, are all intricately connected to the networks of power which determine both the *normal* and the *neutral*. Interrogating the purpose of these conceptual habits, therefore, is an effort to denaturalize the hegemonically constucted, and by politicizing it, make space for alternative understandings.

What, then, is the work accomplished by the limited debate in the literature on embargo? Does the very existence of a debate, with two opposing positions, work to reinforce the image of totality asserted by the hegemonic construction? So many of the terms of the debate are shared between the oppositions, but by staging an antagonistic debate, the illusion of difference is maintained. Our attention is drawn to the minute distinctions between how success and goals are defined, instead of to the shared conceptualizations of purpose, definitions and limited relevance. The unquestioned use of these shared assumptions also serves to re-inscribe their dominance; this debate both relies on, and perpetuates, the hegemonic notions of security and violence. How does this legitimate the arguably violent notions of state-hood and sovereignty, which were built on exclusionary principles and enforced through imperial violence?

Within the limited debate field of the mainstream literature, the main question is about effectiveness, and so I turn now to interrogate each side of this "debate." What work is done by assuming the effectiveness of embargo? We've seen that the assertion of effectiveness is used by policy-makers to justify the use of embargo, and impacts the number of sanction regimes in existence. In what ways does optimism about embargo's effectiveness contribute to the un-seeability of violence? The tool is argued to achieve its stated goals, and inflicting violence on the civilian population is not explicitly one of the

stated goals, therefore violence is not part of the equation. The assertion of policy effectiveness could in this way create a distance between the policy and its violent impacts, and diverts blame from the issuing country. On whom is the blame for these deaths then placed, and again, for what purpose? In the case of the Iraqi sanctions, Saddam Hussein's government was blamed for holding back rations, contributing to the malnutrition and starvation of his people, and this claim was mobilized to justify further action against his regime.[146] The overall argument of the effectiveness of sanctions could serve in such a case to demonize the target country further, by making those deaths exogenous to the embargo system.

Analyzing the source of theoretical understandings is important to understanding their impact. From which locality is the case for embargo made? Optimism about embargos is likely forwarded by a liberal or neo-liberal theoretical framework, crafted from a Western tradition and geo-spatial location of power while being implemented almost exclusively in the "global south." Embargo is seen, in a liberal paradigm, as one of the economic mediating tools by which peace can be kept by international institutions, coming out of Wilson's hope for collective security. A condition of complex interdependence is what makes the effect of isolation a concern.[147] If a state were to be entirely self-sufficient and autonomous, then becoming an international pariah would not have as much of an impact, or be considered a threat. Does the image of embargo as effective, then, justify these neo-liberal ideas of the world as well? How does the effectiveness of embargo rely on and legitimate a specific neo-liberal vision of the world, wherein the international community is an economic and a social relation, where shared values are a requirement

[146] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 78.

[147] Complex interdependence is laid out in Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*.

for entry, and where membership is a privilege?[148] If barriers to trade are the punishment, or the threat, how does this image of embargo then create the assumption that free trade through open borders is the reward and the uncontested goal? Put another way, if embargo is a "negative economic tool,"[149] how does the case for its effectiveness legitimize and justify other positive economic tools – such as development programs, foreign direct investments, and structural adjustment programs, which have been identified to further imperialist projects?[150] The neoliberal view of the world also relies on and reproduces an assumption that the West has a right to intervene in the matters of the Global South. Does the assumption that the economic tool of embargo works further the assumed effectiveness of other interventionist mechanisms, and sideline their critique?

The claim of embargo effectiveness justifies the use of the practice, especially in policy circles. What, then, is accomplished by assertions of its non-effectiveness? A more neo-realist framework could not see economic interests prevailing over the fundamental questions of military security. Do claims to embargo's non-effectiveness therefore re-inscribe militaristic understandings of security? They could justify the continual increasing of military funding against those threats that otherwise might have been responded to by embargo. After all, if embargos are not seen to work, what other action is necessitated in their place? A neo-realist paradigm also exhibits a severe distrust of international cooperation. In a state of anarchy, there is nothing keeping countries to their international commitments, and therefore nothing to keep states honoring a sanction

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[148] We will explore more about which norms are enforced and on whom in Chapter 3.

[149] O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, 3.

[150] See for example, Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law," 749; Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 41. More in Chapter 3.

regime. Such an analysis might highlight the extent to which "sanction busters" undermine the effectiveness of a regime, for example, which serves to re-inforce this skepticism of international cooperation while asserting the futility of embargo.[151] How does the assertion of the non-effectiveness of embargo justify military intervention into targeted regions, while simultaneously dismissing the harm caused by embargo on the ground?

What, then, can we say are the political consequences of knowing embargo a certain way? We have seen the way violence gets removed from the picture when drawn as it is by dominant IR theory. Where embargo is seen as effective, there is no downside to its implementation; and where it is seen as ineffective, military options would need to accompany it to achieve success, but it is a harmless tool on its own. Both sides of the debate equally erase the impacts of embargo on the ground, on the lives and the bodies of those impacted. But what purpose does this occlusion serve? Or in other words, what is the functionality of construing embargo as nonviolent? I would propose that construction as non-violence legitimizes the tool for use, requiring less public justification than a practice which is understood as violent. The cover of a peace for this deadly tool gives sanctions less public scrutiny while maintaining their impact through violence. Joy Gordon argues that this has been compounded with the rhetoric of "smart" sanctions, which – by differentiating itself from the more-easily criticized sanctions of the 1990s – legitimizes current regimes while maintaining the harmful parts of their structure.[152] In addition, whose voices are considered legitimate to engage in this debate, and whose

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[151] As argued in David Leyton-Brown, ed., *The Utility of International Economic Sanctions* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

[152] Gordon, "The Invisibility of Human Harm," 872.

experiences are excluded on the basis of relevance? How do the limitations on the debate serve to center a Western perspective of international relations, since it is Western countries that most often employ this practice, and Western states whose security is conceptualized?[153] How does this understanding of embargo, and this debate, divert consideration of non-western countries' autonomies, authorities and agencies? How does it also divert attention from non-state actors, or regions not granted the authority of statehood, through its reification of a contingent definition of state-security? Embargo represents both the product of hegemonic closure, and reproduces hegemony through its maintenance of the underlying assumptions of state-centerdness.

This chapter has made visible the contingency and therefore the necessary partiality of the dominant discursive understanding of embargo-as-nonviolent. In this way, the dominant understanding is de-naturalized, and the condition of possibilities is cracked open to allow for more possible considerations, more possible actions, a different possible approach. The following chapters interrogate other aspects of embargo than those deemed relevant by the dominant theoretical constructions, pushing past the closure and occlusions enforced by hegemonic IR. The hegemonic closure of the discipline shuts down these avenues of inquiry, naturalizing power and seeking to make it unchallengeable and thus unchangeable. Forced closure, the exclusion of alternate possibilities of international behavior through the privileging of a statist analysis to the detriment of human life, constitutes a violence of its own; what Spivak and Stoler refer to as epistemic violence.[154] To address these violences, the violences of embargo, and to

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[153] Tickner, "Re-Visioning Security." Argues that state-centrism is Euro-centrism, based on how states are conceptualized (p. 180).

[154] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 207. As Stoler states; "the fictions of [concepts'] 'stability' [..] entail violences of their own." (p. 17)

explore these questions at greater length, the next chapter of this project draws on critical feminist IR theory, and alternative conceptualizations of embargo.

Reflexive openings

This chapter presents a reconstruction of a violent norm. In some ways, I worry about the effect of presenting such a fully fleshed out image of this construction, lest it be convincing or legitimizing. Laura Shepherd (2008) warns of just such a thing in her analysis of gendered security.[155] She remarks on a pattern in critical theory wherein the dominant theoretical understanding is set up as a bogeyman to be taken down by the critique. "Every time a view such as this one is expressed," she says, "it (re)presents realism as the orthodoxy that it professes to be, thereby increasing its status as the orthodoxy."[156] By reconstructing the position of hegemonic theory to this extent, am I simply reinstating it as dominant, handing to it all the authority of that designation on a silver platter? Am I reinforcing its status as orthodoxy, as hegemony, but stating that it is assumed?

I do think this reconstruction serves an important purpose, however. The most firmly built construction can be deconstructed, when it is contextualized in and through forces of power, but a deep understanding of the logic of hegemony is required to subvert it. Enumerating the violent effects of embargo will be enough to prove its violence to an audience whose discourse is inclined to hear it. But where the discursive formation is sufficiently closed, this violence will still not be seen, and will continue to be dismissed as irrelevant. Through the study and uncovering of those hegemonic processes of closure, I hope that we can make sense of the dominant image, and better present its alternative.

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[155] Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Security: Discourse as Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

[156] Shepherd, 56.

Understanding the logic of how embargo can coherently be both deadly and peaceful is therefore necessary to dismantling those terms, and presenting its violence in such a way that dislodges its claim to peace.

It is with an open mind, I hope, that the reader turns to the next chapter, allowing for the further problematizing of this account of embargo, and the construction of an alternative based on different grounding assumptions.

Chapter Two: Embargo-as-violence

In the previous chapter, we analyzed the network of meanings that are used to exclude embargo from considerations of its own violence. Using Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse, we looked at the process of hegemonic closure through the suppression of ambiguity and the construction of boundaries of relevance. We identified security as a nodal point, whose meaning shapes the condition of possibility of violence and, in turn, enforces closure on the meaning of embargo. In the specific understanding of violence and security that is dominant in the IR cannon, embargo cannot be considered violent. Nonviolence is therefore not the only identity embargo can hold: it is a specific understanding that serves a specific purpose. In this chapter, I seek to unpack an alternative perspective of embargo. By understanding security and violence differently, inhabiting them otherwise, feminist IR theorists make room for an understanding of embargo that recognizes the violence of the practice.

This chapter examines the discursive function of renegotiating security, towards an understanding of human security, and violence towards a meaning of structural violence. These concepts require that embargo be understood as a violent practice, infringing on the security of people and causing harm and death. After outlining the concepts of human security and structural violence, and their impact on our understanding of embargo, this chapter analyzes the discursive means by which feminist theory challenges the hegemonic norms of IR: using two tools – experience and equivalence – feminist theory reveals the inadequacy of dominant IR definitions, and pushes for renegotiation, resulting in an understanding of embargo-as-violence. This chapter then explores the literature that take the violence of embargo into account, and interrogates its political implications.

A feminist perspective

One of the central implications of Laclau and Mouffe's relational network of meanings is its inherent instability despite the illusion of fixity: a meaning shift or contestation to any of the signs results in a ripple throughout the network, shifting and contesting meanings throughout the discursive formation. So as much as the meaning of embargo is fixed by its closed relations to the stable meanings of violence and security, so too is it made vulnerable by that relationality. Instead of contesting the meaning of embargo head-on, its nonviolence can be made an impossibility through the renegotiation of its related concepts. Throughout this chapter, I will be drawing on feminist IR theory, insofar as it provides tools for the challenge of hegemonic closure and the re-imagination of the practice of embargo: to this end, I will be focusing on the theoretical renegotiation of the concepts of security and violence. Central to much of the feminist theoretical project, especially in an established discipline like IR, has been a project of renegotiation, of deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction. One of the founding thinkers of feminist theory in the discipline, Ann Tickner, demonstrated this strategy in her piece "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," where she takes on realism by contesting and reconstructing each of its foundational principles.[157] She argues that each principle is partial, and suggests an alternative formulation based on feminized rather than masculinized values. As Runyan and Peterson put it in their review of Feminist Security Studies, the uniting subversive strategy of a feminist politics in IR is to reveal and displace the "partialities, distortions, and contradictions inherent to the patriarchal text and practice of realism."[158] At its core, a discursive project. By relying on

[157] Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation."

[158] Runyan and Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism," 67.

these discursive interventions, I will not be representing all of feminist theorization, nor attempting to. Instead of trying to organize by distinction – liberal feminist, stand point feminist, socialist feminist, post-structural or post-colonial feminist – I will be approaching feminist theory as a whole, while recognizing that it is not a monolith.

Renegotiating (human) security and (structural) violence

The sites of challenge and meaning-negotiation that this chapter highlights are the concepts of human security and structural violence. Neither of these concepts is strictly or solely feminist, but they have nonetheless become central to feminist IR analyses. The concept of human security emerged in development work as an alternative conceptualization to state security.[159] Whereas state-centrism limits threats to security to that which threatens the territorial integrity of the state, human security labels as insecurity that which affects peoples' lives, the "ordinary citizens," independent of consequences for the state.[160] Originating in a 1994 UNDP report, the new concept of human security sought to center people rather than states in the conversation of security, making room to consider threats from economic, environmental, and public health sources.[161] In this way, human security is fundamentally connected to the concept of structural violence, which emerged from the realm of peace studies. Johan Galtung (1969) argued that the traditional definition of violence – dominant then as it is now –

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[159] Aili Mari Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," in *Gender, Violence, and Human Security: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Myra Marx Ferree and Christina Ewig (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 6.

[160] Tripp, 7.

[161] UNDP noted seven dimensions of human security: economic, health, personal, political, food, environmental, community. Oscar Gómez and Des Gasper, "Human Security: A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Human Development Report Teams" (UNDP - United Nations Development Programme, 2013), https://repub.eur.nl/pub/50571/.

was too reliant on acts of violence from individual actors.[162] Single aggressive parties could not be identified as responsible for the kind of structural barriers that cause death and harm to people's lives, or account for the social violence and social impediments faced by people during times otherwise deemed stable and peaceful.[163] Galtung proposed a broadened definition of violence which encompassed cultural, economic, social sources such as hierarchical relations of power, and structural barriers to success and access.[164] The UN definition of human security integrates both these concepts, considering economic, personal, food and health insecurities.[165]

The concepts of human security and structural violence, intimately connected despite their different theoretical roots, both contribute to a project of re-imagining embargo. They each displace the state from the center of analysis to force open the limited boundaries of relevance, and challenge the enforced closure of embargo. We saw in the previous chapter how limited understandings of security and violence enclosed embargo as nonviolent, how the practice was excluded from considerations of violent international interference, and how the impacts of the practice were excluded from its analysis. By changing how we understand those nodal points – security and violence – the meaning of the whole network shifts. The discursive project of feminist theory challenges the meaning of embargo, therefore, by altering the meanings of its relationally connected signs. Human security cares less about threats to territorial borders and more about

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[162] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

[163] Mark Vorobej, "Structural Violence," *Peace Research* 40, no. 2 (2008): 86.

[164] Andrew Dilts et al., "Revisiting Johan Galtung's Concept of Structural Violence," *New Political Science* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 192.

[165] "What Is Human Security?," United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, accessed August 23, 2019, https://www.un.org/humansecurity/what-is-human-security/.

threats to human lives. Under an understanding of human security, embargo becomes a security threat itself, as its imposition endangers human and community lives. Similarly, violence, when understood as a military phenomenon defined in relation to state security, excludes from consideration the impacts of embargo. But when defined in broader terms, encompassing structural and economic forces of harm, structural violence allows for the inclusion of the impacts of embargo as violent. Human security and structural violence allow us to account for the deaths caused by embargo, refusing their occlusion, and shaping an understanding of embargo-as-violence.

In order to make discursive space for this alternative understanding of embargo, I argue feminists make use of two hegemony-disrupting discursive strategies: those of experience and equivalence. Using experience means harnessing feminist theorists' different locations in discursive formations to highlight the inability of hegemonic discourses to confer meaning – what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as social antagonism.[166] From this understanding of the discourse's contingency, feminists use the logic of equivalency to break down the chains of differentiation that create identities for concepts, and make space for their re-interpretation. The following sections unpack these discursive processes.

Challenging hegemony: experience

In their theorization of social antagonism, and the potential for counter hegemonic negotiation, Laclau and Mouffe emphasize the key role of experience.[167] Hegemonic

[166] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 108.

[167] This chapter will focus on Laclau and Mouffe's perspective on experiential knowledge, in order to respond to the hegemony established in chapter 1. Experience as knowledge can be justified in many other ways, for example, whether for a rejection of the constructed and gendered objective/subjective binary, a standpoint approach which legitimizes perspective as knowledge source, or a political praxis which seeks to amplify

discourses attempt to transmit full and complete systems of meaning onto us, and are doing their work when we are unaware of them. As we've seen, discourse dictates all meaning and social practice, and so experiencing the failure of discourse to transmit coherent meaning is one of the ways Laclau and Mouffe argue that we can become aware of our discursive structures. We can be told that security comes from the state, but when we have experienced violence from agents of the state, violating our security or our community's safety, that meaning will not sit with us – it will fail to cohere or shape our understanding of the world. In that moment of discursive dislocation, Laclau and Mouffe argue, the "limits of every objectivity are shown," making us "a witness of the impossibility of a final suture."[168] We become aware of the forces that are trying to enforce hegemonic closure by their failure to do so. When the limitation of the discourse is felt, and we are made aware of the discourse's presence, in that space we have agency. As David Howarth (2000) puts it, Laclau and Mouffe "stress the role of agency in challenging and transforming social structures," and it is this dislocation from hegemonic discourse which "compels the subject to act."[169] Social antagonisms, therefore, "reveal the boundaries or political frontiers of a social formation," and make possible the fight against hegemony.[170] For Laclau and Mouffe, this means that hegemonic discourses need not be inevitable or everlasting: the possibility of agency means we can challenge them, and they suggest we can do that through harnessing experience. To contest the hegemonic construction of embargo, therefore, feminists use experience to displace the state.

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voices from below. In order to narrow the scope of this chapter, we will be pulling on feminist theory as it engages in the specific meaning negotiations identified.

[168] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 112.

[169] Howarth, *Discourse*, 108, 109.

[170] Howarth, 106.

Feminist theory has challenged the dominant definition of security from a place of what is called *dislocation*, embracing "events that cannot be symbolized by an existent discursive order, and thus function to disrupt that order."[171] In order to justify the use of human security and structural violence frames, feminist theory has pointed out the limitations of traditional definitions of security and violence. By centering women's experiences from various localities, they identify extreme insecurity in moments deemed traditionally secure, and find, therefore, that the discourse which defines security in a military and state-centric way fails to confer a satisfying meaning. Feminists in conflict studies look to understand the violence faced specifically by women in post-conflict areas, whose lives are often anything but secure. Hansen (2000), and Sjoberg and Peet (2011) study the sexual violence faced by women in war and post-conflict areas, which has been deemed outside the realm of "war" and "security."[172] The civilian violence and sexual violence perpetrated against women by UN Peacekeepers makes the inconsistency of the definition of security especially clear, where perpetrators of extreme violence can maintain their international status of peaceful, and all the authority that comes with that.[173] The hegemonic definition of security cannot see this violence despite its direct result from international conflict and even its physical nature. This mirrors, in many ways, the ambiguity and dissonance of Wilson's deadly yet peaceful weapon. Sexual

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[171] Howarth, 111.

[172] Lene Hansen, "Gender, Nation, Rape: Bosnia and the Construction of Security," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 55–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740010019848; Laura Sjoberg, "A(Nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 163–82.

[173] See for example Kate Grady, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeepers: A Threat to Impartiality," *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 215–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/13533311003625100; Sandra Whitworth, "Militarized Masculinities and the Politics of Peacekeeping," in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 89–106.

violence has been excluded by the state-centrism and territorial focus of security, in the same way that the impacts of embargo have been conceived of as outside IR's boundaries. Human security rejects those borders of relevance, and by allowing these violences to be brought into the picture, highlights the failure of traditional definitions of security.

Feminist theory also draws on experiential knowledge to trouble and problematize the way states have traditionally gone about achieving their security. For many lived experiences, the state is the source of violence and insecurity, rather than a source of protection. Whereas state security sees increased militarism as increasing security, and the state's ability to defend itself, some argue that more guns leads to more *in*security for people, when taking as a measure the lives of communities rather than states.[174] Additionally, policies forwarded to further the "security" of the state have provoked increased insecurity domestically – increased surveillance, policing, state control which are the end-products of "security" policies, can lead to extreme violence, especially against racialized bodies. Stoler refers to this as the construction of an internal enemy, and it especially impacts racialized communities in western countries.[175] These people are not secured in the attempts of the state to secure itself.

Many feminist scholars also highlight the ways in which the state and the institutions that make it up are involved in creating conditions of structural violence against their members. Christine Sylvester offers the conclusion that security for women is always partial and elusive because of the violence of patriarchy, and that the state is always

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[174] Tickner, "Re-Visioning Security," 180.

[175] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 231.

engaged in the production of insecurity through systematic oppression and exclusion.[176] Tickner identifies state-sponsored insecurity in the maintenance of gendered divisions of labour, the tolerance of poverty and its exploitation through uneven wealth distribution, structural adjustment programs, and the degradation of the environment.[177] As she puts it, "for a large portion of the world's population, security has as much to do with the satisfaction of basic material needs as with military threats."[178] To come to these conclusions, feminist scholars mobilize the experiences of women on the ground, as well as the concepts of human security and structural violence. From an experience of state violence, both military and structural, Peterson describes state security as "implicated in the reproduction of hierarchies and in the structural violence against which they claim to offer protection."[179] Both structurally and individually, therefore, feminist scholarship contends that states cannot be defined as the source of security.

These state-specific challenges come from a broader place in feminist IR, which contends that the assumptions of traditional theory have come from a masculinized space, and masculinized assumptions, and are therefore partial by necessity. Sandra Harding pushes back against the naturalization and universalization of dominant frameworks, arguing "In societies organized by male-supremacist gender hierarchies, men, their ideas

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[176] Sylvester cited in Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1290. Similarly, Runayn and Peterson describe state-craft as "man-craft," the pursuit of control over the uncontrollable, the space of anarchy and war wherein women have no place, and conceptions of femininity are forcibly excluded (Runyan and Peterson, "The Radical Future of Realism," 68.)

[177] Tickner cited in Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1298.

[178] Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," 435.

[179] Peterson cited in Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1297. Image of the protection racket repeated in Sjoberg, "A(Nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket."

and practices… only mark historically specific masculine examples of the human."[180] The image of the state as an objective, autonomous and rational entity is such an idea: an empirical observation but rather a normative construction that privileges an idealized masculinity.[181] These constructions are therefore partial, and also exclusionary. Each of the state's characteristics are constructed in opposition to a gendered pair – objective/subjective, autonomous/relatedness, rational/emotional – excluding and devaluating the feminized in opposition to the masculinized.[182] This analysis is used to prove the partiality of the hegemonic discourse: at the most, the discourse only represents half the available perspectives. But by de-naturalizing and de-neutralizing the assumptions of objectivity and rationality, this theory makes room for the consideration of all other possibility. As Laclau and Mouffe write, "necessity only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency."[183] Feminists challenge the ground upon which dominant theory stands, refusing to assume its universality or its necessity, and thus revealing hegemony's inherent contingency. This work allows them to push for other and further questions, outside the realm of the debate established by hegemony.

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[180] Sandra Harding, ed., "Introduction Beyond Postcolonial Theory: Two Undertheorized Perspectives on Science and Technology," in *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader* (Duke University Press, 2011), 11, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393849-001.

[181] Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," 431. Along with objectivity/subjectivity, reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, self/other, autonomy/relatedness, knowing/being, public/private

[182] Tickner, 431. In addition: Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft" argue that the androcentrism of the construction of the state has made women invisible in IR; and Laura Sjoberg, "Gender, Structure, and War: What Waltz Couldn't See," *International Theory* 4, no. 1 (March 2012): 1–38, https://doi.org/10.1017/S175297191100025X argues that international strucutures are understood as gender-neutral because men take their perspective to represent the human, the neutral, the universal. Pettman argues gendering IR means pulling from and including women's perspectives and experiences and is necessary to truly make sense of the world. (Jan Pettman, *Worlding Women: A Feminist International Politics* (St. Leonards, N.S.W, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

[183] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 97.

Overall, feminist scholarship in IR poses the question: who is it that is being secured by state security policies?[184] This founding questions is rooted in Cynthia Enloe's (1990) early challenge – where are the women? – and is central to disrupting the central understanding of security.[185] It challenges IR to shift its lens of analysis and its frame of reference to include people, and the impact of their theories. When applied to the study and construction of embargo, it forces us to consider the human security violations and structural violence caused by the imposition of the practice, and encourages us to actively gender and racialize that understanding, refusing the universality of hegemony. It forces us to acknowledge that embargo causes violence for people, and impacts people on the ground differently based on their social realities. That is the work done by feminist theory, centering human security, and dislodging embargo from its protected identity of nonviolence.

Challenging hegemony: equivalence

In our examination of the dominant IR discourse, we saw a series of differentiated pairs that helped to convey meaning onto the concept of embargo, which we called definition through differentiation. We looked at the military/economic dichotomies which served to separate embargo from violence, as well as the international/national differentiation which fixed the boundaries of relevance in the discipline, and made the on-the-ground impact of embargo unseeable through the hegemonic frames. The concepts of human security and structural violence reject these conceptual differentiations. Human security denies the difference between the international and the domestic by arguing that

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[184] Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1290.

[185] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2014), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6.

individual and community concerns are matters of international security relevance because of their interrelated causes and effects. Structural violence rejects the distinctions between military and economic sources of violence by arguing that life-restricting and life-ending harm can come equally from economic factors as from military ones. Gendering both of these concepts locates violence and insecurity in times of nominal peace, and challenges strict hegemonic reliance on a war/peace distinction. By using these conceptual frames, the dualisms are not able to protect embargo from its violence, and instead its impacts are centered.

Discursively, we can examine the rejection of these dichotomies as the manifestation of what Laclau and Mouffe call the logic of equivalence.[186] Meaning is established discursively, as we have seen, through chains of differentiation. Signs are given understood identities by establishing what they are *not.* For example, for a long time "the political" was understood as what happens in *public* – established in contrast to what happens in *private*. That which happens in private could not be considered political because of the differentiation established in the discourse. The logic of equivalence undermines these discursive differentiations by making visible that which is the same across the dichotomy. As a challenge to the hegemonic structures, it seeks a "relation of total equivalence, where the differential positivity of all its terms is dissolved."[187] The feminist rallying cry of "the personal is political," therefore, can be read as the establishment of equivalence between "personal" and "political" in such a way as to challenge the sign's differentiation. By highlighting an underlying same-ness, feminists are challenging the discourse which defines the political in opposition to the personal,

[186] Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, 115.

[187] Laclau and Mouffe, 114.

and demanding a re-definition of political that includes where women experience both; for example, domestic violence in the home, and gender-based discrimination in the work place.[188] In collapsing dichotomizations, feminist theory presents a challenge to hegemonic discourses, and forces the renegotiation of meaning.

Feminists in IR seek to extend this logic of equivalence to the international space, and to challenge dichotomies internationally. Cynthia Enloe's book, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases,* concludes that the "personal is international; the international is personal."[189] The public/private delineation of political relevance is mirrored in IR by the dismissal of the domestic to the prioritization of the international. As we saw in Waltz's third image, the international is defined in opposition to the domestic, and the latter is excluded from relevant considerations.[190] Enloe argues that this view erased women entirely from the picture in the same way that the public/private dichotomy has excluded women from politics. Similarly, the impacts of embargo are, by this logic, erased from view, as they are both domestic and private. They are most felt in households and within families, outside of what is traditionally deemed "political," as well as being exclusively sub-state and thus firmly outside the "international."[191] Just as with the fight to bring domestic violence to public attention, feminists in IR argue that "violence at the international, national and family levels is interrelated."[192] The international, they argue, cannot be

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[188] See for example, Susan B. Boyd, ed., *Challenging the Public/Private Divide: Feminism, Law, and Public Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

[189] Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*. Runyan and Peterson echo this – calling the public and private the "inside" and "outside" of IR theory, and challenging that distinction ("The Radical Future of Realism," 68.)

[190] Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*.

[191] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 73.

[192] Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1296. Jacqui True's work is demonstrative of this push to change the angle of analysis, as she studies the "political-economic structures that underpin gender inequality and women's vulnerability to violence, especially at the global level." (Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20.)

differentiated from the domestic, as people experience the events of the former from the position of the latter. They point out an underlying sameness, and challenge the differentiation through equivalence. Through this, feminist theory makes room to examine the domestic impact of embargo, while challenging the hegemonic limitations of dominant IR theory.

When it comes to embargo specifically, the logic of equivalence works by breaking down the differentiation between sanction and war. In the last chapter, we saw that embargo was established as nonviolent by being defined against that which is violent – military force and warfare. To challenge this definition requires the elimination of this difference, and establishing the equivalence between embargo and war: embargo as warfare, embargo as violence. Calling for the end of the Iraqi sanctions, scholars and activists wrote a damning piece entitled "Sanctions are weapons of mass destruction," to dismiss the differentiation between kinds of death, and assert a "same-ness" underlying the impacts of embargo.[193] The same work is accomplished by Meyssan (2019) who writes: "Economic sanctions are a white-collar war."[194] By centering human life, the concepts of human security and structural violence reject the distinctions made between different forces that cause harm – all deaths are violent, and embargo cannot be shielded from violence. Wilson's statement, therefore, that embargos are deadly and peaceful becomes completely nonsensical. Human security and structural violence contest the categories that keep violence and death apart.

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[193] Noam Chomsky et al., "Sanctions Are Weapons of Mass Destruction," in *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, ed. Anthony Arnove, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 217–21.

[194] Thierry Meyssan, "Economic Sanctions Are a White-Collar War," in *Economic Sanctions*, ed. Kristina Lyn Heitkamp, Global Viewpoints (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, LLC, 2019).

The literature on the violence of embargo

By mobilizing experiential knowledges, feminists are able to prove the inadequacy of the hegemonic discourse to dictate the meaning of security. Human security, with its focus on people rather than state abstraction and its allowance for structural sources of violence, is proposed as an alternative concept – pulled out of the field of discursivity that is marginalized by hegemony. The hegemony of traditional IR theory is further undermined in the feminist project's use of equivalencies to dismantle the chains of differentiation which have fixed meanings in the dominant discourse, and by targeting the organizing concepts like security and violence, feminists are able to destabilize the whole discursive network, and renegotiate meanings all along the chain. It is in this way that an understanding of embargo as violence emerges – as the conceptual implication of the renegotiated human security and structural violence.

It is worth noting that, despite the existence of the contesting concepts of structural violence and human security for decades, the hegemony of dominant discourse in IR remains strong. Challenges like the one presented by feminist theory must be seen as processes, and the mere existence of alternative conceptualizations is not enough to overcome the power upholding a singularity of meaning. This can be seen especially, as all discourse can, by an examination of what is assumed. Whereas there are some spaces in which human security is *the* dominant meaning – as Tripp argues is the case in some policy circles of the UN[195] – it continues to require the modifier of "human." The sign "security," in its unmodified form, maintains its assumed meaning of traditional state security. That being said, I consider feminists to be engaged in continual counter-

[195] Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," 3.

hegemonic work through their mobilization of experience and equivalence, and through this work, they successfully make room for a counter-construction of embargo.

Just as we asked of the concepts of security and violence as defined by the dominant discourse, we turn now to interrogate the impacts of these conceptual frames on the study and the practice of embargo. Just as those concepts were demonstrably useful to some political projects rather than others, the concepts of human security and structural violence make visible some, and occlude other, venues for inquiry. In the dominant account of embargo, it was easy to identify a key body of literature in which there existed specific debates; there was an asserted totality and universality, and firm boundaries. There is not an equivalent neatly bounded theorization of embargo from a feminist perspective. Instead, accounts of the impacts of embargo on-the-ground contribute to the understanding of the violence of embargo, and make use of the alternative conceptions human security and structural violence.

Empirical accounts which detail the violences of embargo refuse to accept embargo in its peaceful formulation. Affirming the interconnectedness of economic and international forces, they highlight strains on the economy of the target country and its impact on public health. Garfield and Santana (1997) emphasize the various technological and resource shortages which impacted malnutrition and disease during the Cuban embargo, and the social impacts on a country with a previously robust public health system.[196] Capaccio (2002) and Pellett (2002) do similarly with their discussions of the consequences on the health of Iraqis during the economic sanctions regime, and the ineffectiveness of so-called humanitarian exemptions or food-for-oil programs to deal

[196] Garfield and Santana, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis and the US Embargo on Health in Cuba."

with the crisis.[197] Each of these empirical accounts emphasizes staggering statistics of the death toll associated with the lack of access to food, medical resources, vaccines, and sanitation, demonstrating the insecurity inflicted by embargo. Capaccio, for example, illustrates the dire state of the economy by employing the statistic that by the late 1990s, 80% of a family's income was spent on acquiring food.[198] Financial insecurity, combined with the threat to a family's survival, is highlighted as a direct effect of sanction policy.

Empirical studies use conceptualizations of structural violence and human security through their analysis of the impacts of global forces on individual lives, but they are not necessarily gendered. As Tripp points out, not all conceptions of human security use a gendered frame.[199] Buck, Gallant and Nossal argue for a gender-sensitive analysis of embargos, to understand how economic sanctions impact men and women differently, identifying silences in broader IR on women, and in feminist IR on sanctions.[200] They argue that the gendered social division of labour in Iraq meant that women were responsible for managing those areas where the sanctions impacts were felt most directly: health and sanitation of the household, caring for sick children, acquiring water and fuel were all socially deemed women's work.[201] They also note that men and women were impacted differently by the decline of the informal economy, in which many women worked due to social exclusion.[202] Where women had made in-roads into the formal economy, Yasmin Hussein Al-Jawaheri (2008) argues, was in the public service and

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[197] Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People"; Pellett, "Sanctions, Food, Nutrition, and Health in Iraq."

[198] Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People," 175.

[199] Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," 11.

[200] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 73.

[201] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, 81.

[202] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, 82.

through state-sponsored education, both of which were hit particularly hard by the sanction regime.[203] The once robust educational system all but collapsed under the sanctions regime, with students being forced to work instead of study and the salary of the once well-respected profession of teacher was reduced to almost nothing.[204] The structure of the sanctions regime intensified these issues as well: under the food-for-oil program, only one percent of revenues could be used to fund education, and the lead in pencils was infamously banned under double-use provisions for its potential military function.[205] Al-Jawaheri connects these economic realities with social conditions, arguing that these jobs had been important for the social acceptance of women's participation in public life, and that the economic hardships and restrictions put a lot of stress on domestic and familial relationships, intensifying patriarchal control of the household, as well as fostering an increasingly regressive political fundamentalism.[206] These studies highlight how the social and structural violences of a patriarchal society were intensified by the condition of embargo, impacting the security and well-being of the people of Iraq.

In 1995, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated that the international community had failed to consider "the ethical question of whether suffering inflicted on vulnerable groups in the target country is a legitimate means of exerting pressure on political leaders."[207] The study of the ethical implications and justifications of embargo is another area of the literature in which human security is taken up, and used to destabilize the dominant meaning of the practice. Pierce and Bishops (1996) and Gordon (1999)

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[203] Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 132.

[204] Capaccio, "Sanctions: Killing a Country and a People," 179.

[205] Capaccio, 180.

[206] Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq*, 137, 140.

[207] Pellett, "Sanctions, Food, Nutrition, and Health in Iraq," 186.

contend that it is the centrality of harm to civilians that makes the practice of embargo unethical and unjustifiable.[208] Gordon argues, while trying to untangle the nominal peace and the destruction of human lives in the practice of embargo, that it is comparable to an act of siege: during a siege, systematic deprivation is used to put pressure on a leadership, utilizing the harm and hardship done to the city or nation's non-military inhabitants to coerce a change in behaviour.[209] Violence to the innocent, the non-military, is therefore central to the practice, and cannot be ethically justified. Despite its centrality, civilian harm is written out from the dominant understanding of the practice of embargo. The definitions we have seen do not conceptualize the harm to the state's economy in terms of its impact on "civilians." Sjoberg and Peet argue that since the principle of civilian immunity is so well established in the practice of war, the scholarship focuses only on unintentional harm to civilians and is unable to see intentional civilian victimization.[210] There is no frame of reference for practices that intentionally harm civilians – it is institutionally unseeable, but unavoidable on the ground.

In a similar fashion, the violence caused by sanction regimes is not unknown by those instituting them, but rather is unknowable: it exists outside the realm considered as relevant or possible, even though it is in fact central to the practice undertaken. Despite the facts before their eyes, the harm of embargo does not fit into their conceptions of what constitutes violence, or is justified away through logics of international control. In 1996, Madeleine Albright, the American Secretary of State, stated that the price of half a

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[208] Pierce and Bishops, "Just War Principles and Economic Sanctions"; Gordon, "A Peaceful, Silent, Deadly Remedy."

[209] Gordon, "A Peaceful, Silent, Deadly Remedy," 125.

[210] Sjoberg, "Gender, Structure, and War," 165 makes this argument with relation to war-time rape and forced impregnation. And the ways in which the concept of civilian is gendered.

million Iraqi children dead as a result of the sanctions in Iraq was "a very hard choice, but the price — we think the price is worth it."[211] Although later stating she regretted saying it, in that unguarded moment, she revealed what was the governing logic of the American sanction regime: those deaths were understood, not as the unintended consequences of embargo, but as embargo working as it should. The deaths, hardship, and ultimately violence incurred as a result of the sanctions were exactly what the US and the UN hoped would make the Iraqi government change policy course. Gordon argues that the new language of 'targeted' and 'smart' sanctions merely addresses a public relations problem, rather than changing what is fundamentally true about economic sanctions: they hold a population hostage for the actions of their leaders, while hiding behind the guise of peace.[212] Policy analyst Richard Nephew is an architect behind several American sanction regimes, and said this while describing the newer "smart sanctions":

> The irony of all this is that sanctions are ultimately intended to cause pain and change policy: denying some of that pain may make for better public relations for a sanctions program, but it also undermines the contention that sanctions work and may even interfere with their effectiveness on a practical level if a sanctioner adjusts the regime to address a humanitarian problem and, in doing so, reduces the very pain the sanctions are intended to create.[213]

The centrality of pain, as Nephew calls it, actually makes any attempt to redress humanitarian concerns of the practice counter to the effectiveness of the tool. And yet

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[211] Democracynow.org, "Democracy Now! Confronts Madeleine Albright on the Iraq Sanctions: Was It Worth the Price?," Democracy Now!, July 30, 2004, http://www.democracynow.org/2004/7/30/democracy_now_confronts_madeline_albright_on.

[212] Gordon, "The Invisibility of Human Harm," 872. She additionally argues that the rhetoric of "smart sanctions" – like smart bombs – makes unnecessary systems of monitoring for humanitarian impact, and that therefore, human harm is made invisible. See Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals" for a further analysis of the discourse of "smart" or "clean" bombs, collateral damage, and other constructions in military discourse.

[213] Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions*, 12. It's worth noting that, despite Nephew's hawkish approach, he does not fit into what could be considered the hegemonic theoretical construction, as he views sanctions as "a form of violence," (p. 10). He theorizes the best way to enact that violence, and inflict that pain (in his own language) to achieve the desired result of sanctions.

these violences that determine its effectiveness can only be seen and recognized through the critical usage of structural violence and human security.

Interrogating political consequences

The conceptual constructs of human security and structural violence allow us to destabilize the presumed legitimacy that comes with the status of peaceful. These conceptual renegotiations take the legs out from the understanding of embargo as nonviolent, and create discursive space for the consideration of its violence, politically and theoretically. It is important, at the same time, to not accept the supremacy of these concepts uncritically. To do so would involve *re*placing rather than *dis*placing the terms of the discourse. Simply centering new definitions in a counter-hegemonic project risks recreating a new hegemony, rather than pursuing the continual interrogation of political power. Spivak argues that centralization and marginalization are parallel processes, the one necessitating the other.[214] Any centralization, any act of definition or meaning-fixation, necessarily creates a marginalization, and closes off a field of discursivity. Moving from the margins to the center, therefore, does not erase the existence of the margins. In fact, hegemony reasserts its dominance through the perceived adaptation to opposition – as Spivak put it, "the putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin."[215] Hegemony reasserts its power through institutions in this very way, by coopting and neutralizing its critics.[216] This hegemonic cooptation can be seen in the United Nations' use of the language of human security. While we've seen that a true adoption of the framework of human security makes

[214] Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," 31.

[215] Spivak, 35.

[216] Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations," 172.

embargo-as-nonviolence an impossibility, the UN maintains both a working definition of human security and a definition of embargo that distinguishes it from violence.[217] It has not adopted the full spirit of the re-conceptualization, or answered its challenge. Instead the UN has acted as what Cox calls *transformismo,* "absorb[ing] potentially counter-hegemonic ideas and ma[king] these ideas consistent with hegemonic doctrine."[218] As Tripp argues, the "applications of a human security framework so far have all too often looked like conventional interventions," and served to reify state interests instead of dismantling them.[219] The UN, in Rear and Jones' language, pulls these challenges into its hegemonic orbit and "conscripts them to its cause."[220] By adopting the language of the critique, hegemony neutralizes their critical impact while maintaining its predetermined path and protecting its interests.

It is for this reason that we cannot simply call for the replacement of the concept of state security with human security, or violence with structural violence. A displacement, not a replacement, is required. We must ask of these concepts: what are the implications of these theoretical constructs? What work do they do, what do they accomplish and what do they hide? Which relations of power do they contest, and which do they uphold? Which conditions of possibility are centered, which are made necessary, and which are marginalized?

I ask, therefore; what is the political project served by these accounts of embargo? Many critical works are more explicit about their political aims than their counterparts in

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[217] "What Is Human Security?"

[218] Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations," 173.

[219] Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," 11.

[220] Rear and Jones, "Discursive Struggle and Contested Signifiers in the Arenas of Education Policy and Work Skills in Japan," 381.

hegemonic theory who make claims for objectivity. The tradition of critical theory tends to be less concerned with clouding or obscuring their political projects, and so it is more straightforward to identify their goals. By highlighting the violence of embargo, these works serve to center experiences that are generally ignored, and to hold global actors accountable for the lives they are decimating.[221] Where assertions of the nonviolence of embargo make the practice more easily justifiable, the shattering of this image would force global powers to take responsibility for the harm publicly. Taken as a presentation of alternative accounts, critical theory also serves to draw attention to the partiality and complicity of dominant constructions, and in this way, is a hegemony disrupting approach. Critiques of embargo are often presented as critiques of the foreign policy of issuing countries as well, and so often take the form of critiques of American expansionism and imperialism.[222] These implications of the theory are fairly self-evident, and often even self-acknowledged. But since concept work demands that we probe and interrogate the evidently self-evident, we turn to ask: what else is accomplished by this theory?

In what ways do these accounts of embargo contribute to narratives of female (or feminized) victimization? Particularly in the geopolitical spaces where embargos are laid – namely the racialized spaces of the global south – it is crucial to interrogate the role of the construction of victim in justifying international intervention. Does the focus on the violences of embargo, despite being critical of western interventionisms, contribute to

[221] For example – Anthony Arnove, ed., *Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002).

[222] See for example Gordon, *Invisible War*; Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*.

this construction of certain racialized and gendered bodies as victims?[223] It is well studied in the feminist literature that rhetorical justifications of saving, protecting and liberating women are used for the validation of western warfare and intervention. As Mohanty, Riley and Pratt put it, "manipulation of racialized discourses of male supremacy and female helplessness as justification," are mobilized for US imperial wars.[224] Cynthia Enloe uses the term "womenandchildren" to draw attention to how often this phrase is used in militarized logics, and the conflation of women and children that strips women of any possible agency.[225] Similarly, Sjoberg and Peet look at the gendered construction of the concept of "civilian," arguing that victims of aggression are feminized whereas their aggressors are masculinized. [226] While civilian is at its core a gendered construct, it is at the same time used to mask the kinds of gendered violences women face in war zones. In what ways do narratives of female (and feminized?) suffering during embargo contribute to these global justifications?

At the same time, the racialized nature of global conflicts, and the White Western dominance of feminist academia, means the racialized coding of feminist theory must also be interrogated. This has been described as the phenomenon of "White women saving Brown women,"[227] as an extension of the white saviour complex within feminist scholarship. Mohanty warns of the "colonizing effects of Western feminist scholarship,"

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[223] See next chapter for the discussion of externally constructing identities.

[224] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Robin L. Riley, and Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Introduction: Feminism and US Wars - Mapping the Found," in *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism* (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2008), 3.

[225] Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

[226] Sjoberg, "A(Nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket."

[227] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rosalind C. Morris, eds., *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

and so this too must be interrogated.[228] In the critical literature on embargos, whose voices are centered, whose experiences drawn from, and by whom? These questions are vital, both as a political praxis to make space for marginalized voices, and to center those who are more often excluded from conversations about their own lives. They are also vital to producing good scholarship. As we saw in this chapter, experience is a counter-hegemonic tool, so relying on the experiences of those most impacted by embargo, from their specificities and localities, makes for a more effective challenge to hegemonic power. In addition, it impacts who is given agency in this literature, and whose solutions are considered credible. Is the victimization of racialized feminized subjects in the literature of the human security and structural violence of embargo another case of white women seeking to save brown women? Who is constructed as the saviour, once this violence is made visible? These are racialized dynamics inherited from historical and contemporary imperialism, that have the potential to be recreated and reproduced in the embargo literature.

Similarly, in what way does the focus on individuals in concerns of human security lead to a sidelining of structural forms of oppression? In accounts of the impacts of embargos, the stories of violence emerge from individual accounts. While prioritizing and valorizing experience is important to a hegemony-disrupting critical praxis, what structures does this approach uphold? How does it reify the "individual," which is itself a construction – in the same way the "civilian" is? The definition of human security as it is laid out by the UN continues to make security a question of state concern, originating

[228] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 516, https://doi.org/10.1086/342914.

from the state, and defines people in terms of their relation to the state.[229] Who is excluded by the category of "ordinary citizen"? Which relational and communal concerns are sidelined, and made invisible, by this reification of the individual? What is needed to push these concepts further?

Finally, embargo in this literature is constructed as a state of exception, a rupture from the status quo that brings with it violent impacts. Buck, Gallant and Nossal situate their study of the gendered impacts of embargo in contrast to "normal," non-sanction hardships.[230] What are the implications of arguing that cutting off and restricting trade constitutes an act of violence? Does this then construct free and unrestricted trade as the goal, an unblemished and unquestioned good? Young (2018) reminds us of the violence that is inherent in free trade, and forced processes of trade liberalisation,[231] and Mohanty (2011) advocates for a strictly anti-globalization anti-capitalist form of transnational feminism, which recognizes "capitalism as a system of debilitating sexism and racism," with globalization and free trade as the newest forms of colonialism.[232] Does the focus on the hardship of sanction conditions lead to a valorization of the status quo, making invisible *its* violence? Or, similarly, does focus on the intensified violence of patriarchy under embargo lessen the call for change against an un-sanctioned patriarchy? In other words, how do we maintain critiques of a violent status quo, while simultaneously highlighting the violence in a state of exception.

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[229] As argued by Tripp, "Toward a Gender Perspective on Human Security," 11.

[230] Buck, Gallant, and Nossal, "Sanctions as a Gendered Instrument of Statecraft," 74.

[231] Zoe Pflaeger Young, "The Gender Dynamics of Trade," in *Handbook on the International Political Economy of Gender*, ed. Juanita Elias and Adrienne Roberts (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2018), 456–69.

[232] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 514, 512.

The following chapter will provide an opportunity to engage with some of these questions in more depth. Whereas this chapter began the project of dislocating dominant understandings of security and violence such that embargo can be inhabited differently, the next chapter begins to ask some further questions of the concept. By pushing the concept further into its contextual and historical place in the world, it challenges embargo to make sense of its discursive function in world affairs.

Reflexive openings

Before moving on to examine some of these questions further, and follow the implications of having the hegemonic knowledge constructions opened and the field of discursivity made accessible, I'd like to close with a brief reflection on process. In these examples and interrogations, I have used feminist critical theory to critique a feminist critique of embargo, and I am not unaware of this irony. The feminist literature in IR is wide and varied, and draws from many epistemological and ontological locations – so much so that I wonder about referring to it as a singularity. It is not a weakness but rather the strength of feminist theory that it maintains the ability to critique itself, constantly pushing for better and more rich analyses. This is what prevents it from becoming what Spivak calls dogma, preserving its critical function to question, interrogate, and push while being aware of its own limits.[233] Feminist analyses must be able to both rely on an understanding of human security while at the same time interrogating its limitations and biases.

I also reflect on the implications of mirroring the critique of hegemonic theory in the critique of a critical alternative construction. We recognize throughout this work that all

[233] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge," in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. David Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 142.

theory is located in a political project. Making this opening in hegemonic theory is itself subversive, because it refutes hegemony's claim to universality and neutrality. It does not have the same effect of critical theory, as critical theory rarely makes those claims. By highlighting the contingency and partiality of the critical discourse despite its counter-hegemonic strategies, am I negating its critique of the dominant theory? What I find useful about the deconstructionist approach, however, is the agency it gives us as thinkers to choose which discourses to prioritize. We never exist outside of a discourse, outside of a continually reproducing understanding of the world. But, by being made aware of contradiction, contingency and alternative, and through an analysis of the implications of those intrusions, we can make the choice whether to adopt a discursive shift or not. As thinkers and actors, we have to be aware of the conditions and relations of power through which we operate, and what the implications of our chosen discourses and understandings are. In that space – that social dislocation wherein we can see coexisting discourses – we can choose what is of use to us. Spivak does not dismiss the possibility or even the benefit of creating explanations by recognizing that all explanations result in corresponding marginalization. Instead, she is interested in the "radically heterogeneous,"[234] in "the theory-practice of pedagogic practice-theory that would *allow us constructively to question* privileged explanations even as explanations are generated."[235] Constant interrogation and the constructive questioning of assumption and its political import is a praxis, is a counter-hegemonic political project. It is, in fact, the only way to move forward. The next chapter proposes one lens through which to address these questions. I invite you to question it, interrogate it, and chose whether it is of use to

[234] Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," 33.

[235] Spivak, 46. Emphasis mine.

you. After all, we will always be marginalizing something. What it is we choose to marginalize is what defines our politics.[236]

[236] "I hoped to reiterate that, although the prohibition of marginality that is crucial in the production of any explanation is politics as such, what inhabits the prohibited margin of a particular explanation specifies its particular politics." Spivak, 33.

Chapter Three: Embargo-as-imperial

Up to this point, we have seen two competing understandings of embargo. The first, embargo as nonviolent, we have seen as emerging from a dominant state-centric understanding of violence and security. From a re-examination of the definitions of violence and security comes a competing view of embargo, one grounded in feminist IR theory, which rejects the state as referent object and displaces the dichotomy of international and domestic which mask the violence of embargo. This second view of embargo prioritizes the impacts of sanction regimes, and understands the practice as violence. In this chapter, we will push further into the field of discursivity marginalized by hegemony, and interrogate the impacts of embargo from other angles. Through contextualization and historicization, as well as an analysis of the discursive narratives upon which embargo relies and which embargo reproduces, this chapter sketches a preliminary theorization of embargo-as-imperial. It looks to understand embargo as an extension of imperial control, unpacking how embargo is used to punish global deviance and exclusively serve Western interests. It then explores embargo's role in reproducing racist and colonial narratives of global relations. As an extension of the civilizing mission and a tool for control, this chapter proposes an understanding of embargo, its practice and its discourse, as inherently imperial.

An imperial international order

It is not the purpose of this chapter to interrogate different conceptions of imperialism, but rather to consider some of the ways in which embargo might be implicated in an imperial project. To do so, I will be pulling aspects from conceptions of the global order as capitalist imperialism, and from Ann Stoler's conception of imperial duress as

recursive and reproducing, with material and affective components.[237] We enter this discussion having displaced the state from the center of the analysis of security and violence. To push this displacement further, I wish to bring into analysis the system of states themselves, and our conception of the international order made of sovereign states. I label this an imperial world order, not to implicate the specificities of the debates about what makes up "imperial" power, but rather to highlight the ways the current world system and economic order is based on the bones of empire, and its established racialized distinctions, for the direct benefit of White Western nations. Embargo, I argue, plays a role in maintaining the material and affective conditions of the imperial world order, and in this way, is imperial.

The contemporary international order was born out of empire, conquest and racialized domination. In the early days of empire, the civilizing mission, which Anghie identifies as the animating distinction of imperialism, was predicated on a universality of European standards of law and sovereignty.[238] The failure of non-European states to meet them was linked to natural racial predispositions, and used to justify conquest and intervention.[239] Non-European states were only allowed to enter the international system as it developed under the strict supervision of the League of Nations by the Mandate system, and were subjected to constant interference under the promotion of economic "good governance" to align them with the neo-liberal economic order.[240] The imperial world order is

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[237] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003); Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. The goal is not to synthesize these theories into a single coherent understanding of imperialism, nor to contrast it to David McNally's, Hardt and Negri's or anyone else's. Instead, I will be using these theories to tease out what is imperial in the practice of embargo. McNally cited in Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[238] Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law," 745.

[239] Anghie, 745.

[240] Anghie, 749.

therefore accomplished and maintained through forced liberalisation and the imposition of racialized and gendered divisions of labour. The predatory policies of the IMF and Structural Adjustment Programs force developing countries to adopt a failing model, and themselves constitute an imperial oppression.[241] As Gordon (2010) put it in his study of Canadian imperialism, "Debt bondage and structural adjustment represent nothing less than a plundering of the wealth of Third World countries by the North."[242] This contemporary iteration of imperial relations, sometimes called neo-imperialism, relies on economic and capital controls, rather than the direct military control of classical colonialism.[243] It is based in a capitalist logic of expansion which requires continually expanding access to resources and markets, and constructs a global hierarchy of inequality wherein Western imperial nations benefit from the wealth, extraction and domination of the resources and peoples in the Global South.[244]

The imperial order also relies on a shared set of ideas about how things are, norms of behavior and universalized assumptions about progress. In other words, on hegemony. The rules and understandings about the world – for example the intersubjective assumption that people are organized into states – emerged from empire and are used to sustain the current world order. As Cox articulates is: "The imperial system is a world

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[241] Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law*, Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law (Cambridge, England : 1996) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[242] Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 42.

[243] I will be using the language of imperialism in this chapter to avoid the forced differentiation and historicizing that comes with the language of neo-imperialism, locking military conquest and territorial occupation in the past when it in fact continues today.

[244] Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 10. Throughout this chapter I will be mainly referring to the "West" and "imperial countries" interchangeably and in contrast to the "Global South." These are artificial constructions, of course, just as the "Third World" before them, but I prefer these terms over the euphemistic "developed" and "developing," which center a liberal progress myth, and use them to delineate the relationships of imperial power internationally.

order structure drawing support from a particular configuration of social forces, national and transnational, and of core and periphery states."[245] The same institutions that governed the entrance of states from the South and East into the international community – the League of Nations, the United Nations – as well as the World Bank and the IMF, are the international organizations which Cox identifies as embodying the rules and universal norms of the hegemonic world order. Thus, the ideas about statehood, sovereignty and the right way to engage in the global economy which were imposed by colonization are now upheld through international institutions. Embargo functions as a result of this hegemonic conception – its procedures and understanding coming from the dominant order we identified in Chapter One. At the same time, embargo contributes to the stability of the hegemonic order; by policing acceptance to the international community and by perpetuating its understandings of state-security.

The nature of the contemporary world order is therefore one in which the success of capital in imperial countries relies on the relationship of domination and subordination to maintain its wealth, as facilitated and legitimated through hegemony.[246] It is for this reason that Stoler argues; "The geopolitical and spatial distribution of inequities cast across our world today are not simply mimetic versions of earlier imperial incarnations but refashioned and sometimes opaque and oblique reworkings of them."[247] These are colonial and racialized distributions of access and power, which are being reproduced in international relations contemporarily, as they were scripted historically. Structural

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[245] Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders," 144.

[246] Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations"; For an earlier analysis of the world system, see Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 387–415.

[247] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 5.

Adjustment and forced market liberalization do not only secure new markets for Western exploitation, they also promote the hegemony of economic neo-liberalism.[248] In addition, they reproduce the racist narratives of imperialism, wherein the racialized peoples of the Third World are imagined as inherently incapable of managing their own way, and requiring Western intervention: as Gordon articulates it, "In the mobilization of the defence of free markets… people in the Third World are presented starkly as culturally backward and uncivilized people who need to be saved from themselves by the imperialist powers."[249] When the free markets and neoliberal structures imposed do not liberate them from the condition of poverty, they are themselves to blame.[250] This chapter will engage with this imposition of racist constructions of the global other where specifically related to embargo. In addition, in this view of imperialism, the state has a responsibility to securing stable market relations.[251] Domestically, this means the state is invested in policing and preventing class conflict, but internationally, this translates into the enforcement and policing of Westernized norms which ensure open market access. Where states stray from the rules of the neo-liberal order – when they "go rogue" – they become threats to the imperial order, and must be brought back into line.[252] I argue that embargo – as a means of enforcing international law and punishing deviance – is a tool of imperial control.

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[248] Payne, "US Hegemony and the Reconfiguration of the Caribbean," 156.

[249] Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 13.

[250] Gordon, 13.

[251] Gordon, 33.

[252] Gordon, 14.

Stoler conceptualizes imperial formations as recursive and reproducing, "molten in their form," and as ongoing "processes of occlusion and submersion."[253] Hegemony, in Laclau and Mouffe's understanding, functions in a similar way. It is constantly in process, never completely stable but seeking closure, and always in the face of resistance and social antagonism. Hegemonic discourses, then, are particularly forceful constructions and assumptions seeking universality, and legitimizing imperial control.[254] I argue in this chapter that embargo plays a role in advancing the imperial control of western states over the global south, both as a product of hegemony and in turn enforcing it. As the other side of the neoliberal coin, where foreign investment and structural adjustment are "positive economic tools," embargo is a "negative" tool for economic coercion, and upholding the imperial order.[255] The practice of embargo polices the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, as defined in Western terms along Western interests, and established through hegemony. In this way, economic sanctions are a mechanism to maintain the interests of the West globally.

Imperial control

The definition of embargo, when broken out from its discursively closed frame, can show the roots of its imperial purpose. In its most common form, embargo is defined as a tool to coercively enforce the compliance of the target state.[256] When we do not accept

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[253] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 4.

[254] It is worth noting that Cox separates hegemony from simple domination by the criteria of consent – hegemony fosters consent among the subjugated through the manipulation of ideas, social forces, and civil society, such that domination is legitimated. (Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders," 144.) By using hegemony in the context of imperialism, I do not mean to suggest that the colonized consent to their domination. I use the term to refer to this very specific case of a shared meaning of embargo, which as we have seen, has opposition from lived experiences on the ground.

[255] Describes as such in O'Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions*, 3.

[256] For example David P. Barash and Charles Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 334.

that this is a nonviolent norm of international behaviour, and we place the tool it its historical context, we can see how it is an extension of a long lineage of international imperial controls used to by dominant western states to coercively control the global south. Non-western states have been systematically excluded from control over their own territories.[257] Anghie traces equivalent logics from conceptions of *terra nullius*, to supervised self-governance under Mandates, to being pushed in the direction of good-governance through SAPs.[258] All these mechanisms have been built to align the Global south with a Western norm, a Western "progress." The coercive logic of embargo is another step in this lineage of imperial interference. The similarities of previous mechanisms of imperial control can be seen in embargo's definitions: "to ensure compliance with international law,"[259] to "punish its violation,"[260] to "demonstrate international opposition."[261] It is for this reason that Wall (1998) calls using "economic muscle to dictate policy to smaller developing nations," nearing "straightforward imperialism."[262]

The mechanic and working of embargo also relies on an exacerbation of global power inequities, which are rooted in, and reproduce, the structures of imperialism. To have the effect, as Salvador Allende described them, of "economic strangulation,"[263] the target country must necessarily be dependent on those international connections that are cut off.

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[257] As argued in Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law."

[258] Anghie, 749.

[259] Ripsman and Paul, *Globalization and the National Security State*, 40.

[260] Goldstein, Whitworth, and Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 278.

[261] Williams, *Security Studies*, 195.

[262] Christopher Wall, "Human Rights and Economic Sanctions: The New Imperialism Essay," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 601.

[263] Wall, 603.

American unilateral sanctions became the most strongly felt in Cuba when the Soviet Union fell, and the island had no external support. It is no accident that the countries hit hardest by sanctions are smaller, less "developed" countries – Cuba, Haiti – or countries whose revenues and well-being depend on exports – Iraq, Venezuela. Pape in fact notes that sanctions regimes are the most optimally effective when the target country is "very weak, dependent or in a vulnerable state."[264] These are the states who are in a condition of structural dependency based on their location in the periphery of the world system.[265] Embargo's effectiveness, therefore, relies on the condition of dependence in which the Global South has been placed, and the current world order of exploitation and subordination. The practice then re-instates this condition: the issuing country has the support and power to place the target country in a condition of subordination, possible only when the target state is already vulnerable to exclusion. In this way, embargo relies on and replicates patterns of imperial control.

Looking at the historical record, one of the common usages of embargo has been to exert pressure on the leadership of a state to force their removal, despite never being mentioned in any of the many definitions and descriptions of embargo reviewed. The Cuban embargo is an illustrative example of this imperial desire to control the leadership of a state, despite changing rhetorical justifications over the years. When initially instituted in 1962, the embargo was officially justified in terms of the "subversive offensive of Sino-Soviet Communism," and was part of the United States' commitment to "take all necessary actions to promote national and hemispheric security by isolating

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[264] Robert Pape, as cited in Ripsman and Paul, *Globalization and the National Security State*, 40.

[265] J.S. Valenzuela and A. Valenzuela, "Modernization and Dependency: Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment," *Comparative Politics* 10, no. 4 (1978): 535–57.

the present Government of Cuba and thereby reducing the threat posed by its alignment with the communist powers."[266] Embargo, here, is justified by evoking fear, and conjuring a Communist threat that was central to much of American foreign policy in the Cold War. By 1992, however, the geopolitical context had changed, the Red Scare of global communism having fallen with the wall in Berlin. The Cuban Embargo was therefore re-branded as the Cuban Democracy Act, seeking to achieve conditions "concerning democracy, human rights, and a free market economy."[267] In this re-write, the rhetoric of human rights takes over from appeals to fear, but the practice has remained the same, since it had failed to achieve its goal of removing the Castros from power. In so doing, embargo joins a long list of tactics used to exert American and Western imperial influence in Latin America.[268]

The Cuban embargo is a uniquely unilateral one, set by the United States despite repeated calls for its removal by the United Nations.[269] The goal of removing a leader from power is not unique to this instance of embargo, however. Removing Hussein from rule was central to the goal Iraqi sanctions, which were fully supported and implemented by the United Nations.[270] Similarly, the 1992 Haitian sanctions which sought the return to

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[266] Embargo on all trade with Cuba, Proc. 3447, (1962). https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/proclamations/03447.html

[267] Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, H.R. 5323, 102nd Cong. (1992). https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/5323

[268] Payne frames American enforcement of hegemony in the Caribbean as "attempted diplomatic isolation, surrogate invasion, bizarre assassination plots and ultimately sustained economic boycott" ("US Hegemony and the Reconfiguration of the Caribbean," 158.) See also Gordon, *Imperialist Canada* for an analysis of the coups and invasions in which Canada participated.

[269] "UN General Assembly Renews Long-Standing Call for End to US Embargo against Cuba," UN News, November 1, 2018, https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1024672. Chan and Drury, *Sanctions as Economic Statecraft*, 2000 in fact remove the Cuban embargo from their analysis for this reason.

[270] Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*, 11.

power of US-backed President Aristide, after a military coup deposed him.[271] The current Venezuelan sanctions have at their core the same goal: to exert Western imperial control over the leadership of an oil rich country. We can see the dominance of this goal underlying the rhetoric of human rights and democracy through how the United States measures its success. The Congressional Research Service's report on Venezuelan sanctions deems them not effective because "sanctions have not yet led to a political transition."[272] Throughout its history, embargo has been used to deal with the threat to imperial capital played by states who act contrary to international norms. It is worth briefly reflecting on the fact that orchestrating the downfall of a foreign government is not stated as one of the goals of embargo in any of the literature, and yet is seen to be central to many sanction regimes. The literature either purposefully hides the underlying goal of embargo to overthrow undesirable leaders, or it assumes the West's authority to do so: in either case, the dominant theory of embargo lends its support to the imperial project and upholding hegemony. The next section explores this question further by looking at some of the other justifications used for the imposition of embargo.

Western interests

There are two ways in which I see embargo solely serving the interests of Western imperial power: one is through the failure of other justifications to fully explain their imposition, and the second is the exclusive legitimation of only Western state actors. The human rights justifications that were used in the Cuban embargo are central to the rhetoric of most contemporary sanctions regimes, and are used to defend and explain away Western intervention. In fact, humanitarian justifications have become necessary to

[271] Pierce and Bishops, "Just War Principles and Economic Sanctions," 102.

[272] Seelke, "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions," 1.

most Western foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.[273] When the fight against communism could no longer justify international engagement, an "ethical" approach became a dominant justification to satisfy international and domestic audiences.[274] In the purposes stated by the literature on embargo, genocide and terrorism are highlighted as the prime examples of unacceptable international behaviour that might trigger an embargo.[275] They rely on a shared moral repulsion of genocide, and fear of terrorism, to grant legitimacy to the action, divorcing each from the ways that they have been mobilized to justify invasion and violence, not to mention the racist logics behind the designation of terrorism. The moral justification is harnessed by embargo through its use of human rights justifications for intervention.

In her analysis of humanitarian intervention, Anne Orford argues that the potential of the human rights considerations to displace state interests more often comes up short, and that interventions based on human rights justifications continue to serve to prioritize a state-centric, exploitative status quo.[276] When the rights of "womenandchildren," as Enloe put it, are invoked to justify international interference, it is rarely with the understanding that it is those vulnerable populations who suffer the most in times of conflict; it ignores the extreme forms of gendered and sexualized violences faced by those being "liberated."[277] Those who suffer the most under conditions of embargo are those whose bodies are used to justify intervention. At the same time as using human

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[273] David Chandler, "Rhetoric without Responsibility: The Attraction of 'Ethical' Foreign Policy," *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 5, no. 3 (2003): 295–316.

[274] Chandler, 299.

[275] For example: Williams, *Security Studies*, 195; Heitkamp, *Economic Sanctions*, 107 dedicates an entire section to "Economic Sanctions and Terrorism."

[276] Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention*, 11. This is the same way in which "human security" has been used to justify state-centric security approaches (Tripp, 11).

[277] Grady, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeepers."

rights abuses to justify intervention abroad, Western states rarely account for their own human rights violations. Wall points to hypocrisy of American appeals to human rights when the US is itself not a signatory on several international human rights declarations and does not recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.[278] He also identifies inconsistency in the humanitarian appeal, with justifications for intervention in Haiti and Bosnia, but not Rwanda.[279] Indeed, no one is suggesting an embargo on Canada despite its own acknowledgement of historical and ongoing genocide.[280] These contradictions indicate to Orford and Wall that human rights justifications are covers for other intentions, which they label these as extractive and coercive imperial projects. Orford argues that a secure investment environment for foreign corporations, and securing market access, are the motivating goals behind most post-conflict reconstruction intervention, and that the imposition of control from the IMF and the World Bank merely switches one oppression for another.[281] In this perspective, humanitarian intervention is deeply linked to all other forms of international intervention, where the imperial interests of the intervening force must be understood as primarily motivating. The use of human rights justifications does not change the imperialist project at the heart of the intervention. Sanction regimes justified by human rights should therefore be looked at critically, to

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[278] Wall, "Human Rights and Economic Sanctions," 598 specifically points to Nicaragua v. United States I.C.J. 392 (1984).

[279] Wall, 601.

[280] Wendy Stueck and Andrea Woo, "Trudeau Accepts Indigenous Inquiry's Finding of Genocide - The Globe and Mail," *The Globe and Mail*, June 4, 2019, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-trudeau-accepts-indigenous-inquirys-finding-of-genocide/. For more information, see also: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "A Legal Analysis of Genocide: Supplementary Report" (The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

[281] Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention*, 28.

unearth the other interests at their core – be that leadership removal, securing markets, or other imperial projects.

The second point which indicates that embargoes are themselves tools of empire is the limits placed on their legitimacy. Only some actors, it seems, can legitimately use embargo, and only some norms are to be enforced by its application. Situated deeply within the context of global historical imperialism, these designations are not arbitrary, and we can see how they are used to serve Western imperial interests. Firstly, states are privileged actors. This can be easily understood in the theory which, as we have extensively seen, prioritizes the state as actor in the international sphere. In relation to embargo, this plays out through the criminalization of individuals who attempt to engage in the same behaviours. The Boycott, Divest, Sanction Israel movement (BDS) is an attempt by individuals and individual organizations to bring consequences to the Israeli state for its human rights violations against Palestinians, and its establishment of an apartheid state.[282] It seeks to pressure the Israeli state to comply with the dictates of international law.[283] Despite the similar logic of BDS to state sanction regimes, this movement has not been met with international legitimacy. In fact, it has been criminalized by imperial powers, the United States and Canada for example, who see the movement as a threat to their interests. In 2017 in the United States, the Israel Anti-Boycott Act sought to make BDS a crime and attach jail time to any companies or organizations who engage in "boycotts targeting *any* country that is 'friendly to the

[282] "What Is BDS?," BDS Movement, accessed October 10, 2019, https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds.

[283] "What Is BDS?"

United States.'"[284] Similar appeals have emerged in the Canadian context, with Prime Minister Trudeau recently condemning BDS as anti-Semitic, and legislating opposition to the movement.[285] Boycott and sanction, therefore, are tools reserved for use by *states* and serving *state* interests.

But not all states are equally able to engage in the behaviour with international legitimacy. When the logic of embargo has been reversed, used against the globally powerful, it has been rejected and characterized as illegitimate. In the 1970s, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) instituted what was effectively an embargo on the United States and Western allies for their support and involvement in Israel, which resulted in the 1973 Oil crisis. At that time, the United States fought back, characterizing the embargo as an attack, and taking steps to argue that embargo violated the spirit of the UN's commitment to self-determination.[286] Additionally, the standard of complying with international law by which embargo is often justified is not applied universally. Wall points out that the United States has never been sanctioned by the United Nations, despite its repeated disregard for international law, nor has the condition of democracy ever resulted in the sanctioning of the Vatican.[287] The legitimacy of international coercion is dependent on the location of its source, and its situation within networks of imperial power.

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[284] Kate Ruane, "Congress Is Trying to Use the Spending Bill to Criminalize Boycotts of Israel and Other Countries," American Civil Liberties Union, December 10, 2018, par 4, https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/rights-protesters/congress-trying-use-spending-bill-criminalize-boycotts-israel-and.

[285] Antonia Zerbisias, "Canada Jumps on the Anti-BDS Bandwagon," February 27, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/02/canada-jumps-anti-bds-bandwagon-160225090716458.html.

[286] Wall, "Human Rights and Economic Sanctions," 606. More in James A Boorman (1975) *Economic Coercion in International Law: the Arab Oil Weapon & the Ensuing Judicial Issues.*

[287] Wall, 585.

In these brief examples, we can see that justifications for embargo fall short when they do not recognize its role in maintaining and upholding an imperial status quo. The norms embargo enforces are westernized, and controlled by imperial power, and embargo is only considered legitimate when operating in the interests of the West. Using Foucault's language, the "rightness" of embargo is determined by what truth is given power, and which power determines the truth.[288] Where power and truth are both in the hands of imperial states, the "rightness" of embargo depends on it serving imperial interests, and protecting imperial power. Dominant theory that neutralizes the violence of embargo upholds this hegemonic process by which this truth, and this right, is given power.

Colonial narratives

We have seen that the justifications used for embargo do not always work to explain their imposition, or their purposes. What work, however, *is* done by their application and how can we understand it? How is this affective dimension of imperialism fostered and reproduced through the narratives of embargo, and its justifications? I suggest that the justifications of embargo reproduce and enforce the colonial and racial oppositions by which self and other are defined, in order to justify conquest and intervention.

What Edward Said labeled as Orientalism is a discourse by which the Orient and the Occident are defined relative to each other, with the former consistently being placed beneath, in submission.[289] Through Orientalism, the Orient was managed and produced "politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively."[290]

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[288] Language explained for example in: Burchell, Gordon, and Miller, *The Foucault Effect : Studies in Governmentality : With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*.

[289] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

[290] Robert Young, "Edward Said and Colonial Discourse," in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Chichester, Malden: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2016), 386.

As a region and a people, the Orient came into being through Western study, and by Western eyes was painted as "what had to be left behind."[291] In producing the Other through the Orient, however, the West also produced itself. Through conquest, the West came into being as civilizer, modernizer, democratizer, liberator, defining itself in opposition to the imagined other.[292] These imaginings of Other and Self explained intervention and invasion by creating their necessity. The civilizing mission taught that imperialism was necessary work, to bring civilization, modernity to the so-called "backwards," "barbarian" peoples of the south.[293] Although the categories have mutated over the years, this colonial racist identity continues to be conferred onto the global south. Designations of backwards, undeveloped, corrupt have replaced uncivilized or barbaric to justify imperial intervention, although this latter has re-emerged in rhetoric post 9/11.[294] Under these new guises, these categories continue to reproduce a valorized Whiteness upon which European imperialism was founded, enforcing the inferiority of peoples of colour. "How else," asks Gordon, "can the treatment of Indigenous peoples, violently forced off their land, and workers of colour, laboring in conditions that rival the Industrial Revolution of the First World, be justified, except through an implicit, and sometimes explicit, characterization of them as somehow less than fully human?"[295] At the same time, these categories of identity are also gendered – the Orient as feminized,

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[291] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Race & Class* 27, no. 2 (October 1, 1985): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/030639688502700201.

[292] Tarak Barkawi, "'Small Wars' and Big Consequences: From Korea to Iraq," *Globalizations* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 128, https://doi.org/10.1080/14747730802692724.

[293] Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law," 742.

[294] Anghie traces the shifting frames of the civilizing mission through international law. (p. 750.) For further analysis see: Meghana Nayak, "Orientalism and 'Saving' US State Identity after 9/11," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 42–61.

[295] Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 14.

and Occident as heroic male rescuer.[296] As Barkawi put it, quoting Kipling, "White man's burden on their backs, the colonizers and liberators go forth to save the natives in a hail of righteous gunfire."[297]

Once again, there is much more that could be said about this process of identity coding, its complexities and necessary nuances. I turn my attention to the role of embargo in reproducing and communicating these identities, re-inscribing them in their associated places in global hierarchy. Embargo has been understood to have a communicative role in several of the defining texts; either as third-party signalling to communicate international opposition to the target's actions or leadership, or signalling to a domestic audience, fulfilling a desire to be seen to be doing something.[298] Sara Ruddick and Carol Cohn (2014) argue that the need to be seen to be "doing something," comes from a gendered fear of the perception of vulnerability. They argue that the condition of vulnerability has been feminized, and that to preserve and affirm its masculinized perceptions of power, control, capacity and protection, the state must distance itself from the perception of vulnerability.[299] Embargo, then, can be read as a way for a state to affirm its capacity and control, re-inscribing itself with masculinized traits to distance itself from the feminized conditions of passivity or vulnerability.

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[296] Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," 12.

[297] Barkawi, "'Small Wars' and Big Consequences," 128.

[298] Ripsman and Paul, *Globalization and the National Security State*, 40; Williams, *Security Studies*, 195. Drury, "How and Whom the US President Sanctions" conducts a study of the domestic motivations of sanctions.

[299] Carol Cohn, "'Maternal Thinking' and the Concept of 'Vulnerability' in Security Paradigms, Policies, and Practices," *Journal of International Political Theory* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 46–69, https://doi.org/10.1177/1755088213507186.

In its role of signalling and communication, embargo takes on the job of telling a story about what kind of country we are, and shoring up claims to a "heroic narrative."[300] How we justify the imposition of embargo, how we understand its necessity, and what message it communicates internationally and domestically, all play a role in establishing global identity categories. This "hero" identity must also be read as a gendered as well as a colonial script. Sjoberg suggests that the Gulf War can in its entirety be read through gendered constructions, with a tough but tender American force courageously rescuing the feminized Kuwait from the hypermasculinized Iraq.[301] The imposition of embargo becomes a tool in these constructions, and in the stories they tell. The global hero does not emerge without a villain to conquer or a victim to save. Barkawi (2005) uses the formation of the "half-devil, half-child" from Kipling's *White Man's Burden* to understand the racialization of both villain and victim in the White and Western imperialist narrative.[302] The White Man's Burden, as Kipling characterized it, was to save the "half child," incapable as they are of caring for themselves, and eradicate the "half-devil," whose very existence is a threat. These are horrible, violent, and racist images, that degrade the value of the lives of people of colour, and have been used to justify atrocities. Barkawi identifies their persistent threads in the American invasion of Iraq,[303] and I argue their echoes can be seen in the stories embargo tells. In order to achieve the identity of hero, embargo invests in constructing the Other as either victim, or villain.

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[300] Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention*, 160. argues that narrative, subjectivity and cultural representation can be traced through the stories we tell about the need for humanitarian intervention.

[301] Sjoberg, "Gender, Structure, and War," 18.

[302] Tarak Barkawi, *Globalization and War* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 119.

[303] Barkawi, 113.

Embargo is used as tool for course correction, to re-align states with the necessary norms. The impetus for intervention recalls and re-invites those "colonial fantasies" of uncivilized peoples in need of guidance and correction.[304] As Wall put it, "whatever the reason, the United States sees itself perched upon the crest of a hill bearing the Western human rights torch."[305] This motivation can be seen in the language of the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, which states the Cuban embargo "seek[s] a peaceful transition to democracy and a resumption of economic growth in Cuba through the careful application of sanctions directed at the Castro government and support for the Cuban people."[306] It separates the Government and the people, meaning that the US can construct victims out of the Cuban people, while at the same time targeting their state. As with all humanitarian rhetorics, this justification ignores the fact that it is those very "Cuban people," particularly their women, children and marginalized peoples, who will suffer from the imposition of embargo. Nonetheless, through the language of "support" and the "careful application," the US establishes itself as the helpful guardian, the hero.

The other way to achieve the identity of hero is by constructing a villain. Embargo does this by inscribing the target state as "pariah," and as "rogue." The language of "pariah," emerges from the definitions of embargo. Goldsein et al.'s definition of embargo states that "over time, a sanctioned state can become a *pariah* in a community of nations."[307] In this formulation, the status of pariah is the impact of embargo, the effect of being isolated from the international community, excluded as the racialized Other to validate the norms

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[304] Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention*, 11.

[305] Wall, "Human Rights and Economic Sanctions," 586.

[306] Cuban Democracy Act, quoted in Amnesty International, "The US Embargo Against Cuba: Its Impact on Economic and Social Rights" (London: Amnesty International, 2009), 9, https://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/amr250072009eng.pdf.

[307] Goldstein, Whitworth, and Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 278.

of the White West. As one commentator put it, "By applying restraints, we label the world's most oppressive and dangerous governments pariahs."[308] The unspoken part of that process is how "we" are labled in constrast to the pariah we create. There is a second commonly used label for the deviant states that are punished by embargo: that of "rogue." The US National Security Advisor John Bolton described the imposition of American sanctions in Venezuela as entering them into an "exclusive club of rogue states," with Iran, North Korea and Syria.[309] This is commonly used language, where the targets of sanctions are regularly referred to as "roguish regimes,"[310] or "rogue nation[s]."[311] The frames of pariah and rogue echo Kipling's accusation of "half-devil," justifying and necessitating the violence done to those states. Stoler reminds us of the impacts of colonial narratives that live in the "unspoken distinctions they continue to "cue," the affective charges they reactivate, and the implicit "lessons" they are mobilized to impart."[312] It is through these narrative frames that the West constructs itself as the "real ally" of those they invade and sanction, and they inscribe themselves as hero.[313]

Returning to our operating question, what is the work of these frames? What work is accomplished by embargo when it assigns the identities "pariah" and "rogue" to racialized states? In punishment for being a "rogue," a state – through embargo – is made into a "pariah," excluded from the international community for refusing to take part in it,

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[308] Jacob Weisberg, "Sanctions Help to Sustain Rogue States," *Financial Times*, August 2, 2006, sec. Opinion, https://www.ft.com/content/347eab1e-224d-11db-bc00-0000779e2340.

[309] Wyss, "U.S. Sanctions Put Venezuela in 'Club of Rogue States' like Cuba, Syria, North Korea."

[310] Weisberg, "Sanctions Help to Sustain Rogue States."

[311] Melissa Leon, "Iran Threatens Higher Uranium Enrichment as Stockpile 'Quickly Increasing,' Official Says," Fox News, September 7, 2019, https://www.foxnews.com/world/iran-threatens-higher-uranium-enrichment-stockpile-quickly-increasing.

[312] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 5.

[313] Barkawi, *Globalization and War*, 113.

othered for being *Other*. Embargo attaches material consequences to these designations. The punishments for being rogue may result in deaths numbering in the hundreds of thousands, the violence on the ground made visible by the feminist frameworks. The identity inscriptions of embargo extend beyond the state, and can be seen to impact our perceptions of each other as people. Domestically, orientalism through foreign policy can be used to shape our perception of "outsiders" in our society, of racialized bodies that are coded in certain ways.[314] As Stoler phrased it, imperial regimes were "predicated on making common sense of the categories of persons against which society had to be defended and reshuffling this membership as situations changed."[315] Embargo, then, becomes a way for these hegemonic distinctions to be drawn, and these membership categories to be upheld internationally, but with effects that take place domestically as well. When Wilson wrote to promote the powers of boycott in the 1920s, he extoled the virtue of the tool which brought irresistible pressure upon the target nation, while "it does not cost a life outside the nation boycotted."[316] So firm and set are the distinctions established through opposition, that the lives of those *within* the nation boycotted are not worth considering, and do not factor into considerations of peace and violence. This is the same factor that made the lives of Iraqi children of no consequence to Madeleine Albright's sanction policy, allowing her to say that the cost of 500 thousand children's lives was "worth it."[317] The racialized identity of rogue, and its punishment of pariah, can impact how we imagine the very value of the people with whom we share this planet. In

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[314] Examples in Nayak, "Orientalism and 'Saving' US State Identity after 9/11."

[315] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 231.

[316] Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations*, 70.

[317] Democracynow.org, "Democracy Now! Confronts Madeleine Albright on the Iraq Sanctions."

these ways, the practice of embargo, its discourse and the rhetorics through which it is upheld, contribute to the re-imposition of racialized imperial orders and understandings.

Reflexive openings

In a now familiar pattern, I close this chapter by turning to interrogate that which I have just constructed, and the work that I see it doing. By focusing on context and history, this chapter proposes a contextualization of embargo which situates it in the interests of imperial power. What is the function of such an understanding of embargo, and what work does it do? What does it allow us to accomplish, what does it prevent us from imagining?

Conceptualizing embargo-as-imperial allows for an image of the continual impact of the practice in this updated era of targeted, limited or smart sanctions. Current sanction regimes have adopted the language of humanitarian accommodation, focusing on restricted travel, freezing assets and dissuading international business. At the same time, many have argued that this rhetorical move prevents an examination of the continual harms of embargos on the ground,[318] and that this is a symbolic rather than a substantive change to the practice of sanctions.[319] Embargo-as-imperialism gives us another way of conceptualizing the continual harm perpetrated by contemporary sanction regimes, without referring to the increasingly sparse data: regardless how targeted the measures are, the justification and rhetorics surrounding them are state-wide. This means that the imperial work of state identity-formation continues in the era of smart sanctions, as does its violence.

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[318] Gordon argues that "the discussion of monitoring and assessment of humanitarian impact subsided considerably as 'smart sanctions' gained broad recognition and momentum." "The Invisibility of Human Harm," 871.

[319] Arnove, *Iraq Under Siege*, 23.

Through the discursive work of identity negotiation, we can then implicate the theory we have studied here in the violence of embargo. For Said, academic knowledges have always been implicated in the subordination of the Orient, and its characterizations.[320] From the early days, the academic study of the region known as the Orient was central to creating its image in the West, and in turn, creating the West. How then can we understand the relationship of IR theory to the practice of embargo? Part of the imperial and racist violence of embargo is in the stories it tells about states and their relations. The ways in which we understand and construct embargo must also be implicated in this network, the theory that masks the violence of embargo becoming implicated in that very violence. By neutralizing the practice, and justifying intervention, it reinforces the racist civilizing mission-based narratives. And by dismissing the impact of embargo, the theory serves to continue the process by which human lives are not considered worthy of consideration. Stoler says of imperial duress: "If duress is borne, we might ask what forms it takes, the conditions that produce the silenced exertions it demands, encumbered possibilities, relations of power incrementally imposed."[321] How might the construction of embargo be part of the creating encumbered possibilities and relations of power demanded by empire? How might the practice of embargo enforce them, and demand their silence?

I reflect on the fact that this chapter does not provide a political path out, however. While it makes visible more violence, different shades of violence, discursive and imperial structural violence, it does not necessarily present a way to peace or a way to justice. Its deconstruction of hegemony presents strategic opportunities for counter-

[320] Young, "Edward Said and Colonial Discourse," 387.

[321] Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, 8.

hegemony, but it does not lead us to the imagining of a violence free world. Perhaps, however, it can provide the grounding upon which this world could be built. By exploring and interrogating embargo in its imperial context, both historical and contemporary, this chapter provides a window through which to understand the complex and interwoven forces of imperialism at work. It rejects and displaces the hegemonic terms of the IR debate, starting again with new frames of reference and new assumptions. This third and final conceptualization of embargo, therefore, presents a challenge to IR's hegemony, as well as to imperial structures they uphold.

Conclusion

For the past three chapters, we have been exploring contradicting understandings of the international practice of embargo, different constructions based on radically different assumptions. Each of these constructions – embargo-as-nonviolent, embargo-as-violence, and embargo-as-imperial – emerged from different building blocks and blueprints, and resulted in vastly different consequences and different possible futures. In this metaphor of construction, we build buildings just as we world worlds.[322] Shaping our perspectives, these buildings make some vistas visible while always obscuring others; they define what makes up our "already familiar horizon[s]."[323] Strong and long lasting, they span generations and persist through history – but at the same time, are always works-in-progress, being updated and repaired, adjusted to suit new needs. Cracks are plastered, chimneys repaired, windows rearranged. New structures built on the ruins of others can desecrate or rejuvenate, honor history or erase it. A building can be a home, where we are safe, protected, at ease and understood, just as easily as it can be a prison, confining and entrapping and enforcing hard limits on our possibilities. In fact, the very same structure could be a home to one and a prison to another.

The discourses, narratives and practices of embargo contribute to this building, to its walls and shape, and for whom the doors open. In fact, the "world" of embargo itself has specific horizons. It has heroes and villains, rights and wrongs, innocent civilians and demonized criminals. It at once has people to be rescued, and is at the same time

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[322] The concept of "worlding," here being borrowed from Spivak, who speaks specifically of an imperial worlding that creates out of multiplicity and diversity, enforcing the limits and boundaries. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 243–61.

[323] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 141 from whom Spivak borrows the concept of worlding.

uninhabited: "No children are ever born, and nobody ever dies, in this constructed world."[324] It has rogues, outlaws and law keepers – and like the wild west that this invokes, it has unnamed victims confined to the crosshairs, their resilience, strength and struggles for freedom unseeable and unacknowledged in the hegemonic lens. Embargo makes real these narrativizations, scripts and dichotomies, attaching material consequences to the categorizations. It brings offenders to their knees, locking the doors against them.[325] It polices pre-existing categories of "friendliness," while rewarding subservience and sentencing deviance to death. As Wilson predicted, it is perfectly silent, silenced by the hegemonic frames which uphold it, and it is perfectly, terribly, deadly.[326]

By asking specific questions of embargo, running it through several rounds of deconstruction and reconstruction, interrogations and probes, we have challenged the boundaries of this world, and attempted to push past its horizons. We have taken embargo from being a nonviolent tool of peace promotion to the violent weapon of imperial domination it was always known to be by those on the ground. Throughout this examination, we have identified absences, inconsistencies and insufficiencies and sought to respond to them with context and history. We have stripped from embargo the protection of a "peaceful" designation, and brought its impacts into the light and into the frame. We have questioned the relationships between concepts, the work they do and the work we do with them, and have come to a space of broader awareness and agency to make choices for our discourses.

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[324] Elhstain in Blanchard, "The Development of Feminist Security Theory," 1293.

[325] "What brought Germany to her knees was not only the splendid fighting of the incomparable men who met her armies, but it was that her doors were locked and she could not get supplies from any part of the world." Wilson, *Woodrow Wilson's Case for the League of Nations*, 69–70.

[326] Wilson, 71.

The process has involved taking seriously questions of discourse. It has involved interrogating deeply the frames of reference through which we perceive and understand the world, and acknowledge that assumed neutrality is in fact always contingent and partial, the "natural" is always gendered and racialized. We started tackling embargo by trying to untangle its messy meanings from the twists and knots of its discursive location. It was only by pulling out its relationship to the concepts of security and violence that we were able to displace hegemony, and imagine other possibilities. An attention to the relationality of our discourses is therefore absolutely necessary, and to the interconnectivity of the webs of meaning upon which we rely. The limits of one concept can curtail the possibilities of a myriad of others in its web – just as we saw the state-centricity of security make invisible embargo's violence. Discourse determines what can be seen, the conditions of possibility for our concepts, and how they can be understood. Hegemony, for its part, determines which "seeability" is authoritative and legitimized. The boundaries of visibility are thereby deeply political.

Pulling out and identifying discursive connections and limitations is not merely an intellectual exercise, but rather a political project. Each of the differing constructions of embargo had vastly different political impacts – making possible and necessary different political actions, and making visible different political actors. Embargo-as-nonviolent was based on hegemonic IR constructions and justified and legitimized the practice of Western intervention. Embargo-as-violence, on the other hand, held actors accountable for the impacts of their policies by centering experience and drawing from feminist IR theory. Embargo-as-imperial, having been broken out of its hegemonic limitations, allowed for the implication of theory into that violence, and demanded that we imagine

differently. Connecting Laclau and Mouffe's theory of holistic discourse with Stoler's concept work has allowed for this simultaneous analysis of formation and impact.[327] Understanding how embargo came to be through its discursive relations and hegemonic closures, and identifying the nodal points which enforced limits on the possibility of embargo, pointed them out as sites of negotiation and contestation. For a new construction of embargo to be made possible, security and violence needed to be displaced from singularity, and made contestable. Using human security and structural violence to prove the possibility of alternative opened the door for an analysis of the violence of embargo, and its imperial implications. This could also not have been done without the continual and serious interrogation of concepts and conceptual borders. It also requires a conscious attempt to not slide into the habits of thought and inquiry that concepts encourage, habits which only reproduce the relations of power that produced them.

Thinking otherwise of embargo has meant breaking it out of its conceptually locked box, and exploring the wide reaching and varying impacts of the practice, their justifications, and the stories they tell. Taking this new critical view of embargo out into the world, then, means asking different questions about current sanction regimes. It means not questioning their effectiveness in the limited definition of success established in hegemonic theory, or assuming their legitimacy to uphold the imperial order. Rather, it means probing the effects they have on local and global economies, the effects on lives and livelihoods, on families and communities and on narratives and discourses. It means questioning the impact of the practice in long lasting and permeating ways, not limited by

[327] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*; Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*.

the boundaries of relevance imposed by the discourses of hegemony. It means questioning the ways we understand each other, and how our perceptions are shaped by the gendered and racialized narratives of validity, deviance and acceptability. Speaking from my locality, having been raised and socialized in a white Western imperial state, this means I must question my instincts and assumptions, whose voices I find authoritative and whose perspectives I prioritize – whose are even seeable to me? It also means interrogating the practice of embargo prior to its implementation, bringing into the analysis the justificatory scripts being used to explain the imposition of embargo. Determining who benefits from those narratives, from the norms being enforced, and from the status quo being maintained.

One of the habits that this approach might suggest we break is the crutch of comparison. When we start to apply these embargo constructions to specifics and begin thinking through individual acts of embargo, an easy way to avoid its full consideration is to slide into comparison: aren't they less harmful than a military operation? Wouldn't more people be harmed by a full-scale invasion? Isn't this the better of the options? These questions replicate the process of hegemonic closure by enforcing the distinction between embargo and force, deflecting attention from the violent impact of sanctions. But they also serve to re-inscribe the limits on what is acceptable international intervention. The choice of sanction or invasion is a false choice: it assumes that intervention is acceptable, that the intervening Western countries know what needs to be done, and that the fault of the crisis lies with the target country. These narratives re-inscribe and re-enforce patterns of racial inferiority and White Western progress and remove the historical and contextual factors. It also forces a weighing of "our" lives against "theirs."

Sara Ruddick reminds us that in order to value *all* lives, we must reject the distinctions imposed by borders.[328] These hegemonic terms of debate and limits must be rejected.

Looking down the list of Canada's active sanction regimes now, I do not have any more answers than I did when I started this project. In fact, I can only offer more questions. Looking down the list now, I see a long list of stories demanding to be told. I want to ask of each of these embargos: how did you come about? What stories were told of you, and what did they mean to those hearing them? Whose suffering is being exacerbated by your restrictions? What do you mean to the Somali, Nicaraguan or Iraqi communities in Canada, and how are Eritreans, Sundanese and Yemenis on the ground and in their contexts feeling the impacts of these policies? And, how are they fighting back? How are their communities resisting and surviving in spite of your violence? What are the crises that you purport to be addressing, and how did they arise? I want to interrogate the colonial legacies embedded in these conflicts, these crises, and in how the international community acts towards them. Behind each of these sanction regimes are many histories and many stories that need to be highlighted and interrogated. The approach put forward by this project would require looking at each in all its context, and its complex interconnections.

Beyond embargo, however, I believe a deconstructionist feminist and discursive, anti-hegemonic approach to the study of International Relations has a reaching value. Displacing the state, or state interests from our understandings of trade agreements or conflict would radically shift what we consider success, what we would consider to be at stake, what we allow as possible. It would allow us to more fully embrace Ruddick's call,

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[328] Ruddick cited in Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation," 436.

and Mohanty's appeal for an anti-imperial anti-capitalist feminist solidarity, using a framework that takes seriously relationality and context.[329] By displacing the state, and rejecting the terms of the hegemonic debate, this discursive approach led to a radical re-visioning of an international practice. How could we use the same approach to recast and reimagine other practices that have been neutralized and naturalized in a hegemonic discourse? How can we displace these limits for other concepts, other spaces of International Relations? How different would International Relations theory look if we refused to accept hegemonic closure, and the limits it enforces on our study? What could we make room for by this shift, that otherwise have been silenced and closed-off? My moment of discursive displacement allowed me to become aware of the contingency of the hegemonic discourse of embargo, allowed me to engage in this project. But mine is only one experience, and hegemony enforces closure on all of us. How can we collectively imagine another world, beyond the violence of imperial hegemony, beyond the violence of embargo? And how can we make those other worlds possible? I leave the reader with these questions, these openings, as invitations. It is my hope that they strike a chord, spur an interest, and spark continued work. Dismantling the violence of hegemony takes challenging the structure brick by brick, wall by wall.

[329] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited."

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