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## International studies and struggles for inclusion

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## **International Studies and Struggles for Inclusion**

### *Abstract*

*In the three years between the 2019 and 2022 International Studies Association meetings, the profound state of global economic, social, and political upheaval around the world has become unavoidably evident for much, if not most, of the world. Against the backdrop of the COVID19 pandemic, movements for inclusion and resulting backlashes sprang up across the globe. As scholars of international affairs, the members of the International Studies Association seek to understand and contextualize world events. But our members and the organization itself are not passive observers of history. These struggles directly influence the personal experiences of many of our members, within and beyond our profession. For these reasons, ISA leadership felt it was important to mark the 2022 Meeting with a Sapphire Series panel to discuss “International Studies and Struggles for Inclusion.” The panel brought together ISA members from various sections and backgrounds to offer diverse perspectives on a host of topics: How does the field of international studies understand these developments? How do struggles for inclusion affect our members and community of social scientists? And perhaps most importantly: what should the ISA be doing about them, in terms of both scholarship and organizational decisions?*

### **Introduction**

Since the last pre-COVID in-person ISA meetings in 2019, the profound state of global economic, social, and political upheaval around the world has become unavoidably evident for much, if not most, of the world. Protest movements championing social inclusion and equality have dramatically re-emerged alongside swelling public attention to police brutality, identity-based vigilante violence, and state-sanctioned repression on almost every continent; examples range from racist anti-Asian rhetoric and attacks against individuals of Asian heritage in the wake of the COVID pandemic to the homophobic and transphobic declaration of ‘LGBT-free’ towns across Poland. Violent attempts to subvert the democratic transfer of power in the United States and Brazil highlight the entanglement of anti-elite sentiment and vigilantism as part of the apparent trend of democratic erosion, though not all observers agree on just how profound this erosion has been (Bartels et al. 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine – an act of irredentism seeking to depose the Ukrainian government and forcibly annex Ukrainians into Russia – has resulted in the largest interstate war in Europe in over 70 years. Across the globe, efforts to assert and/or maintain national, ethnic, gender-based, and other social identities are on the rise as well. In 2020, there were more state-based armed conflicts than at any point since the end of World War II (Pettersson et al. 2021). The past fifteen years have been marked by one global crisis after another (Gleditsch et al. 2022).

As members of the International Studies Association, we seek to understand and contextualize these developments. But our members and the organization itself are not passive observers of history. Injustice, inequality, and violence in global political events directly and personally influence our members; their implications often fuel controversy within and beyond the formal academy. One such controversy extended to the siting of our 2022 annual meeting: in light of the host US state, Tennessee, having formally adopted in 2021 laws banning transgender athletes from participating in girls' sports competitions and requiring school districts to notify parents before "providing a sexual orientation curriculum or gender identity curriculum" in any kind of instruction.<sup>1</sup> Soon after the passage of such legislation specifically targeting the LGBTQI community, Tennessee was added to the list of localities to which official university travel had been banned by California and other state governments.

Struggles for inclusion have a long history in Tennessee: during the US Civil War, it was the last state to secede from Union and Tennesseans fought for both the Confederate and Union armies. Tennessee was pivotal in the US women's suffrage movement as the 36<sup>th</sup> and final state needed to ratify the 19th Amendment into law as part of the US Constitution. It was also in Memphis, Tennessee, where the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April 1968. By early 2023, it had also become the site from which country-wide protests sprung following the death of 29-year-old Tyre Nichols after a brutal beating by uniformed members of the Memphis Police (January), and a site in which ever-expansive laws policing gender expression in public spaces continue to be codified (March). Without knowing what the future would hold yet recognizing the historical and present-day importance of our meeting site, ISA leadership chose to mark the meetings with a Sapphire Series panel to discuss "International Studies and Struggles for Inclusion." The panel brought together ISA members from various sections and backgrounds to offer diverse perspectives on a host of topics: how does the field of international studies understand these developments? How do struggles for inclusion affect our members and community of social scientists? And perhaps most importantly: what should the ISA be doing about them, both in terms of scholarship and organizational decisions, particularly related to siting conferences in places – like Tennessee – where exclusionary practices are on the rise?

The panel consisted of Tarek Abou-Chadi (Nuffield College, University of Oxford), Kanisha Bond (Binghamton University), Cassy Dorff (Vanderbilt University), Jamie Hagen (Queen's University Belfast), and Cameron Thies (Michigan State University). The conversation was chaired by Cullen Hendrix (Korbel School, University of Denver and Peterson Institute for International Economics). The panelists touched on a wide-ranging set of issues: how to create safe environments in the midst of outwardly hostile politics or unwelcoming attitudes, how the nature of our jobs and institutions of higher learning can interact with desires for inclusion, how

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<sup>1</sup> In 2022, an additional law created punishments in the form of withheld state funding for schools that did not enforce the ban.

the centering of whiteness affects our how we produce and consume knowledge about protest and resistance, and how [dated, inaccurate perceptions of who constitutes the working class can keep academics from engaging in progressive change](#). Reflecting the complexity of the panel's topic and the diversity of the participants, the discussion clearly underscored the notion that the personal, the political, and the academic are often deeply intertwined, [and the discussion was wide-ranging. However, two key points of synthesis emerged. First, we need to recognize efforts at inclusion when assigning "merit" to scholarship and thinking about what counts as engagement beyond academia. Also, when considering the safety of specific local context is key. Communities within states or territories perceived as exclusionary may be comparatively welcoming and safe, while those in states or territories perceived as inclusive may not be.](#)

*Cassy Dorff*

What does it mean to care about inclusion in our workplaces?

Numerous times now during my academic career a conference gets planned—whether it be ISA or another one—at a university or in a state that is deemed unfriendly or unsafe for LGBTQ+ persons. I've spent dozens of uncompensated or unrecognized service hours as a junior scholar talking with colleagues who oversee these conferences. Colleagues call me to ask how to respond to this situation: do we cancel or move the conference? Do we write a statement? At the same time, I receive calls from potential conference attendees: should we ban the conference altogether to be in solidarity with LGBTQ+ people?

What I find most interesting about these discussions is that we are not having similar ones about every conference, everywhere. Meaning, we often have them only when the troubles for LGBTQ+ persons appear obvious, at least to the outside world. And we tend to have reactive conversations rather than proactive ones that center minority and LGBTQ+ scholars and voices in the planning process from the beginning. Here are some things I've learned:

First, planning conferences is a slow game. You might think you already know this but take what you assume it takes to plan a conference of this size and multiply that by three. The organizational complexity of these events is staggering. So, it is an unsound assumption that ISA could predict which cities—at least in the U.S., which is my context—would become less friendly to LGBTQ+ persons based on policies upheld or currently promoted by state legislatures. The choice to site the ISA conference in Nashville was made over seven years ago.

Further, by focusing on state policies to inform our inclusive practices, we assume a lot about how state policies work and what kind of communities they represent. For example, LGBTQ+ folks do live in the American South! According to the Williams Institute, 35% of America's self-reported LGBTQ+ population lives in the US American south alone (Hasenbush et al. 2014). On the whole, according to their data, the LGBTQ+ population is more likely to be African American and Latino than the non-LGBTQ+ population. About 65% of the total US LGBTQ+ population lives in the Midwest, Mountain, and Southern regions of this country. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the states that do not currently provide LGBTQ+ protections often cluster in these same regions: the Midwest, Mountain, and Southern states.

Are we as social scientists surprised that in an age of political polarization and gerrymandering anti-LGBT might policies correlate with the presence of LGBTQ+ folks? No, probably not.

Chasing policy in the context of conference organizing might not make sense because of the shifting nature of policy: ‘blue states’ too have a complicated history of LGBTQ+ legislation. Many states, including blue states, pursued anti-marriage laws/bans before legal marriage was ultimately passed in this country – nearly all the states! Many of these have never been repealed. The current slate of anti-LGBT+ legislation is certainly bad and different, but most states don’t have a clean record. Yes, many states are now “enlightened”, and that matters, but that didn’t prevent them from being hostile to LGBTQ+ folks fewer than ten years ago.

Do not misunderstand me: anti-LGBTQ+ policies have serious consequences. Even when such legislation is not passed, there are consequences.<sup>2</sup> Research (Frost and Fingerhut 2016) shows that simply being exposed to negative messages and discussions about the right to marry has negative impacts on people's emotional wellbeing and their relationships. Flores, Hatzenbueler, and Gates (2018) examine the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ ads and find that higher exposure to ads is associated with higher stress among LGBTQ+ people, but not their cis/hetero counterparts. Furthermore, these policies can harm individuals in our communities whose rights (e.g., to hospital visits, to citizenship, to specific spaces, to certain forms of entertainment) are adversely affected by an anti-LGBTQ+ climate, either directly due to legislation or indirectly due to reasonable concerns about personal and group safety.

My main point is that if conference organizers want to draw a line here, it might be a moving target. And I’d encourage us all to consider how decisions like keeping conferences out of places like Nashville might affect scholars who are LGBTQ+ and indeed live in places like Nashville. It is often a boon to participation of underfunded and underrepresented groups when the conference comes to your town or region. Many scholars, especially junior scholars, benefit from the major annual meetings of organizations like ISA and need these outlets to present their work, network, and stay in contact with peers. If we move all conferences out of the American South, for example, what kind of consequences would that have for minority scholars? Such as LGBTQ+ and BIPOC scholars? Some of our most ‘diverse’ states, like Texas and Georgia, are in the South. We want to be careful that a desire to be inclusive does not ultimately become elitist and exclusive.

I have already touched on issues of safety in a broad sense but let me underscore one point: state policies do not have homogenous effects on cities in those states. Southern cities like Durham, Austin, and Atlanta illustrate this point: Atlanta is known as the “Gay Capital of the South,” and these cities are perhaps the most LGBTQ+ friendly cities in their respective states. Further, to assume that a given city inside of a state like California or New York is going to be safer for LGBTQ+ folks than a city inside of a state like Texas is a dangerous assumption. Metrics of homophobia and transphobia make it clear that, historically, LGBTQ+ safety is not just a “red state” problem (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2021). Although we don’t have data across

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of preparing these panel comments into essay form, the ACLU reports tracking more than 400 anti-LGBTQ bills across the United States (<https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights>).

the full identity spectrum, we know that there are overlapping vulnerabilities to discrimination, bigotry, and violence.

So, what does it mean to care about inclusion in our work lives? It means so many things. While I do not have all the answers and I've never organized a conference, I can say that last minute grand gestures and position-taking are often not as important as reoccurring interactions, relationships, and localized safety. These help us maintain a constant work ethic towards our understanding of one another and ensuring the safety of minorities.

Build communities and care for them at a daily, interpersonal level, not just when the community is under threat by policymakers. If you're traveling with LGBTQ+ friends, check-in with them. Compile a list of LGBTQ+ friendly spaces, circulate it. Figure out if the town has an LGBTQ+ chamber of commerce. Compile a list of LGBTQ+ owned/staffed businesses, share it and patron it during your travels. Finally, center marginalized voices today rather than waiting to address problems later. Don't wait for conferences to solve this problem for us.

*Kanisha D. Bond*

I was invited to participate in this roundtable on the heels of a discussion that I had with Dr. Nimmi Gowrinathan in the wake of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021. Published as an interview in *Adi Magazine*, it ended up as a conversation between two racialized women, of Tamil and Black American heritages, that swirled around making sense of the multidimensional implications of whiteness (Gowrinathan 2021). The interview took us down many paths of exploring how the American ideological commitment to whiteness is often obscured by a refusal to appreciate individual experiences of it, even despite the simultaneous temptation to blame individuals solely for systemic problems. It strikes me that this duality is at the heart of the questions animating this roundtable.

What is the difference between a struggle for inclusion and a struggle against the forces of exclusion? One simply can't pursue inclusion without being serious about acknowledging the forces of exclusion at work throughout our professional lives. Our own personal positions and perspectives are central here; institutions like the ISA, its attendant convenings, and social science itself are simply the agents to this scholarly community's collective principal. Our field does not make changes; we do. With this in mind, I would submit that individual engagement with how we as individuals perpetuate exclusion must be at the center of any advances toward inclusiveness that our collective is going to make. In International Studies as in other fields of study and practice, activism in service of inclusion must be rooted in efforts to dismantle that which thrives on exclusion.

This means that we all bear, individually, a deep responsibility to explore the values and the expectations that are inherent to International Studies, which is as much an epistemic community as a collection of professional organizations and practices. Such reflection can be a monumental

undertaking for some: it can be uncomfortable to admit the mundane and profound ways that we might add to the structural arrangements that support subjugation, or to address those arrangements for what they are. The work of struggle against exclusion will also require us not only to explore privately but to confront publicly those exclusionary values and expectations, and to reject them and their implications.

To be frank, the hegemonic narrative in so much of academia -- which includes International Studies -- prioritizes whiteness in global perspective. Whiteness is a worldview which thrives on the casual and institutional propagation of coloniality, via not only racism and xenophobia but also heteronormativity, misogyny, and a whole host of other arbitrarily hierarchical systems for which domination and exclusion are in the blueprint. Many, many scholars have shown us how prominently this worldview has figured in the empirical realities of (the study of) international affairs, and how it has existed as part and parcel of the historical power of Western academic discourse (Krishna 2001, Henderson 2013, Anievas et al. 2014, Shilliam 2020).

Our colleagues engaged in this work do us a great service in this regard, clearly exemplifying how the continued centrality of individual contribution to the collective intellectual honesty of our community. Similarly, earnest evaluations of how our individual values square with the (collective) professional goals and expectations of International Studies are central to its political health as well. This, without question, demands a candid accounting of what those values, goals, and expectations are. Put another way, it begs an examination of not just the ethics that structure the work we do, but of the morals that we bring to it, and that condition the way we think about building and sustaining community. This may be yet another uncomfortable ask for some, especially if probing and discussing one's morality feels like it is teeing up a judgment. But what if more self-judgment, or at least radical self-awareness, is the key to re-organizing this field around actual inclusion, rather than simply less exclusion? What if we committed not just our commentaries but also our resources (privileges included) to foregrounding, in our work and our institutions, those who are at the greatest risk for the harms that exclusion bears, as well as those who pay the greatest costs once those harms have been realized? This is the baseline from which any progress against exclusion can be made, as it is the one that most fully exposes the true nature of systems that sustain injustice. It is our further responsibility to ensure that any efforts to do so are not actually regressive in execution.

Avoiding this sort of regression involves not just hearing but acting purposefully on the claims, asks, and demands of those who have been systematically excluded and institutionally marginalized (whether by design or by inertia). It involves doing so without attempting to own their experiences by claiming to work on their behalf without being so deputized. It involves continuing to practice decentering ourselves -- and our own emotions about being decentered -- when we're trying to truly and honestly redress the harm that our privileges impose on others, in the ways that we do and communicate our work, as well as in the ways that we gather to discuss

the future, past, and present of our field. This won't be possible for those who have already become inseparable from their privileges, and who refuse to acknowledge the feedback between the systems that reward exclusion and the individual choices that set us up to reap those rewards.

Throughout the 2022 ISA conference, I reflected on the indigenous land acknowledgement statements that were projected in every presentation room. As a starting point, these statements are powerful reminders – or desperately important new information for some – of the true material bases of our ability to convene where and as we do.<sup>3</sup> At the level of ISA leadership, I don't know what the politics were behind these projections. I do know, however, that it clearly takes more than a statement to account and atone for the violence of European-led genocide against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. And I believe that everybody else knows that too; so, what do we, as individuals and as a scholarly community, intend to do about it now? Just as in light of news about yet another instance of deadly police violence against Black Americans, it clearly takes more than an institutional statement about 'a spirit of inclusivity'<sup>4</sup> to account and atone for the genocidal violence of chattel slavery as practiced throughout the Americas, and the institutional and cultural implications that are undoubtedly global yet most starkly borne by the descendants of enslaved Africans. And I believe that everybody else knows that too; so, what do we, as individuals and as a scholarly community, intend to do about it now? Affinity and working groups, caucuses, studies, and reports can be wonderful tools for increasing visibility and awareness of the concerns of marginalized communities within the ISA membership. But do we accept their challenges to our standing political order, incorporate them into our standard practices, and actively work to upend the whiteness of our institution on an ongoing basis? And how do we decide that that work is done?

I ask these questions to emphasize that, particularly for those of us who enjoy privileges that were themselves generated through such enduring violence, it is not enough to simply say that such statements are not enough. There must be an active translation of the knowledge that underpins our awareness into praxis that dismantles those exclusionary systems that were created specifically through, and in many cases for, somebody's actual pain. Beyond calling for an earnest and honest accounting of how we got here, however, I myself hesitate to prescribe what that translation ought to entail, lest it be mistaken for a formula, or a minimum-standards checklist, for what will make ISA and the field of international studies into successfully inclusive institutions. The good news is that the antecedent work of personal, relational, and institutional reflexivity is accessible for just about everybody. It is the willingness to do such work, individually and collectively, that concerns me as a particularly volatile quantity.

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<sup>3</sup> The Native Governance Center offers a nuanced discussion of the opportunities and challenges posed by indigenous land acknowledgements at <https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>

<sup>4</sup> For more on the language of acknowledgement offered by American institutions of higher learning in this case, see Chamberlain, et al. (2021), available at <https://naspa.org/report/moving-from-words-to-action-the-influence-of-racial-justice-statements-on-campus-equity-efforts>



Yet, to the extent that we can do it, through the research, teaching, professional postures, and relationships that we develop through generative actions like convening for an annual meeting, we may have a shot at some valuable progress at neutralizing the forces of exclusion that make true inclusion so consistently elusive.

*Jamie Hagen, Chair of the ISA LGBTQA Caucus*

The question I would like to consider is: What does the struggle for inclusion mean, in institutions and for people?

I am seeing these developments in the push for inclusion in International Studies largely from the perspective of my position as chair of the ISA LGBTQA caucus. Yesterday [March 31, 2022] was Trans Visibility Day, which brought an additional lens to my thinking about trans politics in Nashville, as well as discussions about global queer political developments in general.

One thing I hope we reflect on is the set of expectations and limitations on what an international association and its convention can achieve, as well as who is expected to do the work of inclusion. As the chair of the smallest ISA caucus, I was tasked with and questioned about how to address anti-trans developments, both in Tennessee and globally. Answering these questions forces us to confront the expectations we place on our organization and the effects of well-intentioned diversity and inclusion initiatives that are perhaps at odds with the realities of our professional experiences. Adding to these challenges are the realities of both the pandemic and attendant travel restrictions. Conference travel is prohibitively expensive for some members of our scholarly community, especially global south scholars, limiting who can be here and participate in these conversations (Sarabinpour et al. 2021).<sup>5</sup> “In most cases, universities provide the same travel allowances for academics irrespective of their international status and this means that international scholars can attend fewer conferences with the same amount of money other colleagues use to attend many conferences – a classic case of where equality does not result in equity”, explains Dr Nihan Albayrak-Aydemir (2020).

Relatedly, I had just come off a week of University College Union (UCU) strike action at a UK-based university. I had participated in 15 days of strikes since the beginning of the year. I have been at Queen’s University Belfast since 2019 and have been part of four strikes in that time. In my second year at the university, I took on the role of equality officer at my union, becoming more involved in the UCU Four Fight strike action over pay, casualization, workload, and

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<sup>5</sup> See also Debangana Chatterjee’s ‘How international conferences fail scholars from the global South’: <https://medium.com/international-affairs-blog/how-international-conferences-fail-scholars-from-the-global-south-fbde14e5d1f1>

equality. Notably these UCU campaigns are also confronting sexual violence and racism on campus, issues that were not previously brought into union organizing of this kind.<sup>6</sup>

During this convention I've been on panels discussing different aspects of struggles for inclusion, one about LGBTQI pride organizing and another about critical feminist friends to institutions like NATO. In both contexts we addressed the issue of what it is possible to push institutions to do. Because of my experiences as a UCU equality officer, I also see these issues as another dimension of workers' rights. For that reason, any time I'm discussing inclusion within institutions I immediately focus on the role of unions including for the more precariously positioned colleagues among us. Many precarious workers do not feel safe striking. If we can't address the basic issue of workers' rights and standing vis-à-vis our university administrations, I don't know how we can really expect to have any lasting anti-racist or anti-exclusion action on a campus or at a conference like the ISA annual convention.

These inclusion efforts are compounded by how the discipline – or at least universities – think about impact. Especially at UK-based institutions, there is a lot of emphasis on various measures of impact as defined by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) used to evaluate university research. As a queer feminist the kind of impact I am interested in relates to social justice, which is hard to quantify and fold into the REF standards the university is seeking to satisfy. Before entering academia, I'd been drawn more to non-governmental organization (NGO) work. There are exciting opportunities for partnering with advocacy organizations, but there are real challenges in terms of co-optation (of activism by universities) and who I am representing.

In terms of thinking about what the ISA should be doing, my entry point for engaging with ISA has been through the Feminist and Gender Theory Studies section and the LGBTQA caucus. If it were not for my engagement with the caucus and relationships there, I would not be doing the kind of scholarship I am doing. Mentoring in this space is important for professional opportunities, too. The caucus has 17 pairs of mentors/mentees, some who attended our reception, and several mentioned how meaningful it was and that they thought it would be helpful on the job market. Social media, like Twitter, can also connect individuals with those advocacy networks, and that's especially important for those who can't attend the annual convention.

In sum, institutions such as universities and the ISA need to revisit what their vision of inclusion means in practice, and who is committed to making the necessary structural changes to support this vision. Zeb Larson, a PhD graduate from Ohio State University argues, "Professional societies could use their newsletters and publications to share research by contingent scholars

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<sup>6</sup> Strike action has continued to rise across the US and the UK. December 2022 marked the largest ever US higher education strike action to date with a successful six-week campaign across the University of California (UC) system: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/27/university-of-california-strike-settlement>

alongside tenured academics. Similarly, research awards and grants for adjuncts should be considered as a way to support people who may not have any access to research budgets” (Larson 2020). The recently introduced ISA Global South Scholars Travel Award awarded by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Allies Caucus (LGBTQA) together with the Human Rights (HR) Section and the Global South (GSCIS) Caucus is one example of this type of effort.

While it is important to center the most marginalized within the discipline to inform necessary next steps to create a more just discipline, the larger framework for how marginalized scholars and scholarship is valued, supported, or excluded has much more day-to-day relevance for us than any statement on inclusion ever will. It is not sustainable that those most vulnerable, overworked, and marginalized are continually tasked with doing the work of inclusion. Likewise, those of us who are committed to social justice are finding ways to support one another in communities like the LGBTQA Caucus to continue this work in times of compounding crisis.

*Cameron Thies*

For me the ISA has been kind of a family. And families have lots of troubles, right? But it's been the place where I've essentially made my career through connections I've made over time, so I'm very committed to the association. I think that will probably come through in my remarks.

I've been an out gay man since I became an academic. I understand that I present in different ways. I'm a big, tall, white dude who conveys a lot of privilege. My work is mostly mainstream as well, so there are not a lot of markers that one might imagine would necessarily set me aside from or exclude me from governance and active participation in an academic association. At the same time, I think ISA is a place where we've always been able to have conversations like this one today.

As an institution, the ISA often moves slower than people would like us to move to rectify certain issues. That's true of all institutions, including universities as Jamie Hagen's contribution points out, though it's not an excuse for ISA at all. I recall discussions about the siting policy in 2014, after Louisiana had passed an anti-gay marriage bill. The question was whether we should cancel the New Orleans convention in protest of the bill, or whether we should think about policies in terms of the city/municipality level ordinances and legislation. Most major North American cities are about as friendly a place for most of our members as possible.

My own experience, having lived in southern Louisiana for seven years at that time, was at odds with what I was hearing. I understood the discussion and concern for making sure everyone felt safe and secure at the conference, but what I was hearing people say about LBTQI issues in Louisiana didn't match my lived experience – again, recognizing who I am in that environment.

But southern Louisiana culture – in New Orleans in particular – has always been very LGBTQI-friendly, not that there aren't anti-LGBTQI attitudes there as well. Our siting policy did evolve to focus on policies of cities, rather than states, which I supported, and which fits with Cassy Dorff's point about cities within "red" states being more welcoming environments.

I think the institution has probably done as good a job as it can on these types of issues, even though it is sluggish, and it moves in fits and starts. There's probably much more work for us to do, but over time I do think there's value in meeting in places where, as Cassie said, you might not anticipate the positive impact you could have in siting a conference in a location that you might think is otherwise hostile to your members.

To me ISA has always been a place where we can have these conversations. I'm fully committed to the association and moving us forward in the spirit of making this a better place, a more inclusive place where everyone feels comfortable. Having worked with the executive directors and the staff over the years, they would never consciously put us in a location where they thought we were at risk of harm. The staff and leadership of ISA I have worked closely with make good faith efforts on behalf of the association to make it a better place for all members.

*Tarik Abou Chadi*

How does progressive guilt in the academy shape efforts for inclusion?

I want to talk about a political sociology perspective on backlash against progressive change and specifically about our role as academics within that development. I start with an idea that I think everyone has heard before: authoritarian nationalist political behavior, like voting for radical right parties, support for Trump, Brexit and so on can be seen as a backlash against progressive change (see e.g., Norris and Inglehart 2019). This is a common narrative that many people are familiar with.

This narrative has strongly affected how we, as academics, think and behave within the Academy, but also as citizens and public commentators. What we increasingly see is that academics ask questions like do we want too much change? Did we want too much too fast? Has X progressive policy gone too far and provided support for these nationalist and authoritarian movements?

I am going to refer to this type of question as *progressive guilt*. We see academics holding back demands for progressive change because they think we are asking too much, regardless of whether we think it is right from an intellectual perspective. Even if we support a progressive policy, many of us are holding back because we have internalized that asking for too much progressive change will fuel backlash. When this happens, it represents a blurring of the lines

between our academic work and our role as citizens. My own research helps explain why I think this is a problematic development and why I think some assumptions of that argument are wrong.

The narrative that we have around voting for the radical right in Europe is that progressive change on issues such as immigration, but also gender equality, LGBT rights and so on has created a backlash. Those who embrace “traditional” family values, law and order policies and hold strong nationalist (and white) identities, turn to the radical right to signal their protest against a society that in their view is becoming too progressive. At the same time, many people believe and publicly argue that progressive policies are driven by a so-called cosmopolitan, urban and educated elite while they are often opposed by a more nationalist and authoritarian working class (see e.g., Goodhart 2017).

Based on this assumed distinction, we can then see a blurring of our work as academics and of our perception as a social group within this conflict. While many would argue that progressive change is important, that we need more liberal immigration policies or that inclusive LGBT rights are normatively desirable, academics also see themselves as part of the cosmopolitan elite group that supposedly wants this change against the preferences of other groups in society.

This is when progressive guilt sets in. “Are we as academics demanding something that other groups in society do not want?” “Are our demands going to cause backlash among these groups?” “Are we as the elite imposing our cosmopolitan ideas on the less educated, less powerful?” As a result of this thinking many academics seem to shy back from standing up for progressive change in public.

There is a form of normative cyclicity. The idea is that the working class is strongly authoritarian and we, as these left-wing academics, should respect what the working class wants. Because of this, we normatively justify more authoritarian and nationalist ideas because we feel guilty for fighting for progressive values since these are the values of the elite and might cause authoritarian backlash.

Let me outline some problems with this line of thinking, which has become very prevalent in how many academics argue in public. First, there's very little evidence that there is direct backlash against progressive policy change. On LGBT rights but also on immigration policies, we do not see that attitudes or behavior become more nationalist and/or authoritarian as a response to these progressive policy changes (Abou-Chadi and Finnigan 2019; Kustov 2022).

Second, the narrative is also based on a wrong idea of what social groups want. The working class of course is not uniformly nationalist authoritarian. While we know there's a correlation between education and progressive attitudes, the guilt narrative is driven by a very specific idea

of who the working class is: the white, straight male production worker, working in the mining sector or in a factory. That is an idea based on the reality of the 1970s.

If you think of what the working class looks like today – if we think of a person of color, or a woman of color who works in the service sector – it already becomes obvious that this idea of what the working class wants cannot fit with the narrative that the working class just wants more nationalist and/or authoritarian policies.

Moreover, everyone who has worked in a diversity group or on a diversity committee at a university knows that not all academics are progressive. That's not the case. Not at all. In our ongoing research we have done some analyses for example that show that on some gender equality measures more educated men are more hostile to inclusive policies than less educated men (Abou-Chadi 2023). With women, it's reversed. Again, the idea that these groups – the working class and academia – are homogenous and all want one thing simply does not fit reality. If we move away from equating the working class with a white male straight production worker, it follows that we should not have this type of class-based progressive guilt.

As a result of this progressive guilt, we cannot build the hegemony that we need in public discourse and politics to really fight for progressive causes. This contrasts with the 1960s when academics worked with progressive movements to expand the welfare state, increase redistribution, and make democracies more inclusive. Now, progressive causes have been reframed around what some would call cultural issues. Climate change is a good example. Virtually every academic study on climate change makes an argument for why and how we need to fight climate change. But then in political discourse, these questions become reframed around what the urban educated elite wants versus what the working class wants. So, the internal combustion engine car becomes the symbol of the hardworking man. Steps taken to mitigate climate change are portrayed as a type of an elite privilege. This framing is one example of what happens when we withdraw from these debates. Because of this, progressive guilt hurts progressive change.

### *Synthesis and Steps Forward*

The need to work toward inclusion as an ethical as well as practical goal - and to advocate for institutions that facilitate inclusion as a matter of course - continues with unabated urgency. These struggles have broad implications for the field of international studies, given that the persistence of barriers to full participation for all scholars is reflected not only in what we study and how we do it, but also in how our approaches come to influence others as a result.

All of our authors acknowledged that even a slow, at times fitful pace of progress can be a move in the right, and needed, direction for the ISA, as an organization and a scholarly community.

But our panel also warned against - for both conceptual and practical reasons - perpetuating the fallacy that the ISA exists wholly apart from the global community's socio-political realities. The panel members encourage us all to recognize opportunities for the ISA to continue to prioritize soberly addressing the ways in which the organization might reflect, promote, or passively tolerate the societal forces of exclusion that influence the academy from above, and the professional forces of exclusion that influence the ISA from below. Our discussion highlights the interrelated nature of research, public engagement, and association activities in such efforts.

Tension between individual positionality, personal commitments to inclusion, and the potential costs of public commitment to addressing the legacies of exclusion often condition the ways that we evaluate merit, particularly through labeling some work – and some scholars – as “mainstream,” and therefore of interest to a broad ISA audience. Even as reconciling such tension must be a personal project, our journals have a key role to play in reconciling its implications. Our discussion suggests that the editors of our flagship journals in particular ought to be supported in developing innovative methods of increasing transdisciplinary communication, and in further incorporating tested methods of reflecting the diversity of scholarship and perspective in our community, rather than leaving that opportunity to the more subfield-specific journals.

Several panelists also noted the difficulties in valuing different types of “impact.” Now more than ever, government funding agencies—including the state and national legislatures that control public universities' finances—call for academics to demonstrate the real-world relevance of their research in both the social and hard sciences, as embodied in the National Science Foundation's increasing emphasis on broader impacts and the Impact Agenda of the UK Research Excellence Framework. Prioritizing the public value of our scholarship is an admirable ideal. Too often, however, engaged scholarship in community with systematically excluded, targeted, and/or abused peoples is not valued as “real.” When we talk about public engagement or impact, we must acknowledge that impact can come in many forms and engagement around issues of inclusion will often lead academics to engage in non-traditionally academic (including nongovernmental and civic) spaces. If we are serious about promoting and rewarding broader impacts, we need to acknowledge these can come in many forms and via engagement with many different audiences.

Finally, the actual, on-the-ground, lived safety and security of our members must be paramount in all organizational decisions. While state or even national level policies may not be representative of the environment our members will encounter at a given ISA-branded convening, they nonetheless have important human implications for the strength of our community. Ensuring that discussions about conference siting are also inclusive and respectful of the mental, emotional, and material costs of maintaining physical and political security in the

course of academic practice. Ensuring that all members have access to the appropriate resources is an indispensable responsibility.

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