

Postcolonialism and the centrality of violence in a Postcolonial world

Introduction

While relating the Postcolonial to different global events, Prasad defines Postcolonialism as: "artistic, scholarly and cultural traditions that reflect on the Postcolonial tradition" (quoted in Long and Mills, 2008: 389). Security studies have often been overwhelmed by the dominance of the great powers, focusing on observing the world through the categorisation of stronger and weaker states (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006: 329). The larger focus on identities in a Postcolonial context has been disproportionately placed on religion, invisibilising the violence centred around ethnicities. Seen as the problem child of the Indian republic, the Northeast of India continues to remain a theatre of conflict, with the mainland ignoring the experiences in the region (Bhaumik, 2009: 15). Despite active securitisation by the states and the push to create a nationalistic narrative of unity, there continues to be a sense of insecurity. This brings us back to the emerging Postcolonial discourse in the sphere of security studies, which is more concerned with the contradictions between older conceptions and newer forms of knowledge (Barkawi, 2006: 329).

The essay here uses Postcolonialism as a framework of analysis as it examines how the security studies discourse is overwhelmed by a Eurocentric bias, while looking at the power relations and its various asymmetries in play, the essay brings in the case of the Nellie Massacre, which often had been characterised as a 'tribal massacre' in the mainstream discourse during the 1980s (Kimura, 2013: 18).

Postcolonialism, Violence and Colonial Entanglements

Postcolonial scholars have sought to reposition security studies by delving into imperial and colonial histories to identify existing biases (Laffey and Nadarajah, 2018: 2). This repositioning allows contemporary scholars to reimagine the discipline's current boundaries. Postcolonialism reconceives the Eurocentrism of security studies and brings the focus back to violence, establishing that the asymmetries involved in violence are not marginal to world politics (Laffey and Nadarajah, 2018: 130). It allows one to look at the small wars in the global south and how many of these asymmetries can be linked to imperial histories. Claire Wilkinson, while arguing about how the securitisation theory as conceptualised by the Copenhagen School cannot be extended beyond the western states, stated, "the theory takes it for granted that European understandings of society and state are universal" (quoted in Kapur and Mabon, 2018: 1). Power is omnipresent, and the existing discourse when it comes to looking at theories of securitisation stems from a certain degree of Power and the privileging of one form of interaction over another. This understanding allows the state to mask many of its actions under the guise of the rule of law. Efforts to use the power apparatus when

subsumed by a larger political rhetoric, as we will look at in the next section, led to a massacre whose collective memories remain in the population's minds.

Reconceptualising the Nellie massacre

The state of Assam in the Northeast of India is a potpourri of ethnicities and a microcosm of the complex ethnic dynamics that have shaped the region (Mudoi, 2022: 4041). Violence becomes critical when examining the dichotomies of identity and the inherent conflict that has emerged in the insider vs. outsider debate. The tensions would soon reach a tipping point, as a rural area in the central part of Assam would erupt into a frenzy, with the countryside turning into a 'killing field' on 18 February 1983 (Kimura, 2013: 18).

Paul Brass, while arguing about collective violence, pointed to the fact that collective violence is a result of political parties and large-scale organisations using an 'institutionalised riot system' in 'riot-prone cities' (Kimura, 2013: 38). A caveat here is the lack of study of those involved in collective violence; Veena Das thus stated, "One of the greatest lacunae in our understanding of collective action, including collective violence, is the lack of an organised body of empirical knowledge on these issues" (quoted in Kimura, 2013: 47). Thus, there is methodological blindness when it comes to looking at the agency of the participants making it difficult to delve into the reasons behind the frenzy which took over the perpetrators.

Conclusion

The essay demonstrated how Postcolonialism has located itself in the lacunae of contemporary security studies while questioning its epistemological assumptions. Looking at the conception of violence in an asymmetrical sense while delving into the micro-relations through the case of the Nellie massacre signals a changing dynamic, wherein it allows scholars to look at the role of different actors leading to the violence. The essay makes the argument for looking at the Nellie massacre beyond just a 'tribal massacre' and an act of violence which emerged out of selective amnesia. This simplistic understanding fails to account for the complexity of a Postcolonial world and the different forms of violence that continue to shape the political space.

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