

Epidemiological Imperialism: The Medicalization of In/Security in International Relations

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The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn renewed attention to the politics of global health and medicine in the management of international emergencies. IR scholars have already demonstrated that the securitization of global health has important consequences for the priorities with which diseases are framed and treated around the world (e.g. Elbe 2010; Howell 2015; Wenham 2020). However, until now, there has been little research on the ways in which medical knowledge serves as a legitimizing force in the maintenance of global hegemonies. This panel adds to this conversation by highlighting the role that the medicalization of in/security plays in shaping the boundaries of public and political discourse. In doing so it focuses on three intersections: 1.) the relationship between medicalization and the neoliberal politics of austerity, 2.) the racialized and racist dimension underpinning the medicalization of security; and 3.) the specific subjectivities and knowledges such medicalized interventions construct. Through an exploration of the productive nature of medicalization, it becomes possible to redirect the gaze of international relations to an exploration of the sociology of (medical) knowledge in the constitution of modernity and the racial, gendered, and sexed hierarchies it helps to stabilize.

Track Classification: Global Health Working Group