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Methodological Americanism: Disciplinary senility and intellectual hegemonies in (American) public administration

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ABSTRACT

In this introduction, we introduce the concept of methodological Americanism to describe and explain the epistemological problem plaguing the public administration discipline. We argue that the discipline, dominated by US-focused analyses, is methodologically nationalist and White and represents a hegemonic intellectualism that limits what is “knowable.” To ensure continual disciplinary relevance of public administration studies, we propose that epistemological diversity—achievable by reshaping the disciplinary table—is the way forward. We conclude by summarizing how the articles in this first of two Special Issues contribute to paving the way toward epistemological diversity.

KEYWORDS

Methodological Americanism;
Methodological Nationalism;
Methodological Whiteness

Introduction

The discipline of public administration has an epistemology problem. To be clearer, the discipline of public administration as driven by an overwhelming number of published US-centered analyses has a problem. If left unaddressed, the discipline may risk “postmature senility.” Indeed, doomed is a discipline that “has lost the wellsprings of its creativity, that has run out of interesting ideas, that has its premises or its expectations repudiated or reduced to triviality by experience” (Esman, 1988, p. 133). The cause of such a problem lies in research questions driven by systemic bias in its methodological preferences. Such biases limit epistemological diversity and, ultimately, what is deemed as “knowable.”

This is not a bold claim. We are not the first to observe epistemological issues within public administration. Of the many epistemology discussions (for a start, see Adams, 1992; Dobuzinskis, 1997; Heidelberg, 2018; Kickert, 1993; Raadschelders, 1999, 2011; Riccucci, 2010; Whetsell, 2013), we believe such discussions have shared three features: they often engage in methodological nationalism, are methodologically American (or American and continental European), and are methodologically White. The exceptions are largely recent (Candler, 2008, 2014; Haque, Wal, & Berg, 2021; Nzewi & Maramura,

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2021; Santis, 2022; Silva & Batista dos Santos, 2022; Tapscott, 2021) and are few in number.

By co-editing a double Special Issue in which our contributors gently or, in some cases, more forcefully question disciplinary insularity, our aim is clear. This is not about the non-American world asking for a seat at the minority-owned (aka American-owned) disciplinary table. This is also not a demand for another table, in parallel to the American one, in which non-American epistemologies are discussed and promoted but could equally be dismissed. Instead, it is a call to reshape the table from one being led by a minority (US and West) toward one representing the majority (the World), taking a bold step toward the “knowable” through epistemological diversity.

To get started, we suggest that our discipline may have truth *or* method, not truth *and* method (Drechsler, 2001; Gadamer, 2013 [1960]). While others have warned the discipline that its preference for positivist epistemologies may lead to false universalisms with porous foundations (Haque et al., 2021; Heidelberg, 2018) and perhaps even that “epistemological concerns are [have been] ignored in favor of methodological peace” (Heidelberg, 2018, p. 26), we favor another approach. Our approach is about more than whether one’s method is quantitative, qualitative, mixed or whether methodological peace exists. It is about how epistemology and method are fundamentally entwined.

We show how the three known features of most public administration studies encourage limited epistemological diversity and, in doing so, weaken disciplinary potential and relevance. We begin by reminding readers about the perils of methodological nationalism and methodological Whiteness. Each are the backdrop to our introduction of the methodological Americanism concept. This concept helps to situate and to describe a hegemonic intellectualism within the (American) public administration discipline. Our concept creates a space to understand how the non-Western “other” (often overlooked via methodological choice) is infrequently heard, why this is inherently and intellectually problematic, and potential ways forward to reorient systemic bias within the discipline.

Methodological nationalism

In the social sciences, methodological nationalism is understood as a bias toward the state as the “natural” unit of analysis and in which the state’s primacy as *the* key societal actor is uncontested (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003). While methodological nationalists may allow for international (governmental) organizations like the United Nations or global non-governmental organizations, they will subsume any of these organizations’ potential powers into what is directed by and for the state. In the same way, the public administration scholarship may also be characterized as methodologically nationalist while allowing for non-governmental organizations to engage the administrative state but not drive the state. This is because the state, its administrative apparatus, and its policy powers have been historically understood as *the* primary actor worthy of administrative study.

Inklings that such methodologically narrow understandings of public administration may no longer hold began to gain momentum with reconfigurations of European administrative states within and with regard to European Union’s (EU) multilevel

governance (e.g., Aalberts, 2004; Bernard, 2002; Ladi, 2019). Earlier studies focused on the impact of “Europe” on national administrations and vice versa (“Europeanization”) but have since evolved to examine the emergence and transformation of the European administrative space, questions concerning bureaucratic identities, relationship between the European administrative networks and much more (Eckert, 2022; Egeberg & Trondal, 2009; Kassim et al., 2013; Knill, 2001; Trondal, 2010).

Inspired by the European experience, scholars of comparative regionalism have explicitly sought to compare European cooperation in various policy domains—from trade and security to migration, development and higher education—with ongoing and relaunched policy cooperation in other world regions (Börzel & Risse, 2016, 2019; Chou & Ravinet, 2017; De Lombaerde, Söderbaum, Van Langenhove, & Baert, 2010; Geddes, 2021). What unites these various scholarships is the acknowledgement that administration has gone “beyond the state,” with or without the state. This reconfiguration of the administrative state is the lived reality for many parts of the world that remains generally unacknowledged in the American public administration discipline.

Theorizing beyond the EU, Stone and Ladi (2015) questioned whether administration is an exclusively methodologically national exercise. They argued that “there are authoritative domains of public policy separate from the state, de-linked from international organizations and functioning in an autonomous manner that deviates from conventional Westphalian understandings of boundaries” (Stone & Ladi, 2015, p. 4). Instead, such domains are “methodologically transnational” and cannot be simplified into domestic (or national) and international. This simplistic bifurcation ignores the processes of devolution and globalization that have shaped states all around the world—and the US has certainly not been immune. Indeed, the growth of each domain challenges methodological nationalists within public administration and, by extension, challenges assumed administrative sovereignties of the state (Muth, 2019).

While scholars are clear that transnational administrative complexity does not overlook state power as an actor and as a unit of analysis, the release of prior methodological strictures creates space for other policy and administrative actors with transboundary reach to enter disciplinary discussions (Stone & Ladi, 2015; Volkmer, 2019). This includes discussions of transnational public-private partnerships, transgovernmental networks, global citizen activists, informal organizations, and global foundations among others (Jung & Harlow, 2019; Legrand, 2019; Roger, 2020; Schäferhoff, Campe, & Kaan, 2009; Vabulas, 2019). Each have policy and administrative powers which may reach deep into the administrative state. The outputs have led to new discussions about how transnational administration and global policy (Moloney & Stone, 2019; Stone & Moloney, 2019a, 2019b) challenge assumed state primacy, alters administrative sovereignty, and reconfigures scalar notions of where the state sits.

Methodological whiteness

If methodological nationalists oversell state primacy within administrative life, methodological Whiteness questions the centrality of racist and/or (neo)colonial thought within the public administration discipline. The concept describes how “racist thought remains fundamental and integral to the production, legitimation, distribution and application

of security knowledge, and the manner in which that, in turn, transform people and social groups in spaces outside Europe into objects rather than subjects of security” (Danso & Aning, 2022, p. 68).¹ The hegemonic intellectual “other” is thus the nonwhite object. The outcome limits discussions of which ontological realities are deemed important and creates boundaries around which epistemological approaches are valid.

In this space of otherness ignored, the potential kaleidoscope of non-American (and non-West) epistemologies are *de facto* delegitimized. This includes non-prioritization of the “other” among theorists and practitioners but also via pedagogical expectations. If values cannot be separated from facts (Waldo, 1984 [1948]), then the responsible administrative scholar might observe that neither ontology nor epistemology are singular, fixed and ahistorical (Raadschelders, 2011).

We agree with critics who suggest that calls for a decolonization of the discipline may appear hollow (Nisar, 2022; Santis, 2022). Decolonization is neither a singular concept with a fixed meaning nor is it a concept devoid of historical understanding. Its meaning may vary by non-West country and within countries too (Nzewi & Maramura, 2021). Depending upon whom one asks, decolonization is not necessarily “anti-West fad nor a dissuasion to learn from the West and globalized village” (Nzewi & Maramura, 2021, p. 204) but, instead, is a complex act in which justice via epistemological diversity and engaged learning are one part of its whole. When the scholars of methodological Whiteness seek to increase decolonization scholarship, scholars already writing within decolonial spaces are right to be concerned about what such scholarship may look like.

Methodological Americanism

The concepts of methodological nationalism and methodological Whiteness have twenty-first century origins even if the administrative scholarship which has emphasized their conceptual growth can be traced back decades, if not centuries. Each concept articulates a concern with hegemonic intellectualism, with how knowledge is produced,² and how gatekeeping circumscribes the boundaries of what is knowledge. Although neither term originated with public administration scholars, both terms neatly articulate how a “postmature senility” might arise. While Esman (1988) was originally concerned with whether the sub-discipline of development administration might reach senility, we suggest that it is the American parts of the discipline that face the greatest risk.

Empirical work suggesting (American) public administration’s potential senility have noted that disciplinary scholarship infrequently cites non-English sources (Candler, 2008; Candler, Azevêdo, & Albernaz, 2010; Ko, 2013), rarely studies non-Judeo-Christian constructs (Drechsler, 2013) and largely focuses on the United States (Candler et al., 2010; Gulrajani & Moloney, 2012). Such trends have been present for decades (Sigelman, 1976; Van Wart & Cayer, 1990). Where non-Western scholarship is published, it tends to be “small-scale, disparate, descriptive, qualitative, and noncomparative subfield dominated by researchers from the global North” (Gulrajani & Moloney, 2012, p. 78).

The observation that disciplinary scholarship has been dominated by persons writing on the United States is not new. It is found in its pedagogy (Manoharan, Gilmore, &

Rangarajan, 2022), its epistemology (Candler, 2008; Haque et al., 2021; Nzewi & Maramura, 2021; Santis, 2022; Silva & Batista dos Santos, 2022; Tapscott, 2021), its limited desire to understand otherness (Santis, 2022) and, importantly, in the discipline's professional networks that sustain this trend (Nisar, 2022). The output is a methodological Americanism via a hyperactive belief that the state is not only the primary unit of analysis but that the American state and its administration are what should be prioritized. Methodological Americanism is more than a sub-type of epistemic colonialism. It is by far the dominant approach for administrative study within the discipline.

By preferring the American object, the non-American subjects, theories, and concepts are deprioritized or simply ignored. Thus, the public administration discipline (as understood by the American literature) is often unable to “imagine multiple administrative realities as authentic” (Nisar & Masood, 2021, p. 5). When combined with a colonial past and a post-independence neocolonialism, the global administrative outputs are not a sudden inclusivity or thoughtful restorative justice but, instead, the ongoing development of and desired implementation of a “pervasive ideational framework rooted in Western traditions” (Haque et al., 2021, p. 345).

This ideational framework, which is a methodological choice, shares common cause with the prior colonial project where “good” knowledge seemingly arose in the West and, thus, modernization is simply a transfer of what is “good” (aka Western) to the rest. At its core was an assumption of its “universality and inevitability of the spread of Western values and practices such as instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and science-based enlightenment” (Esman, 1988, p. 126). Such a framework fetishized the “other” (e.g., Said, 1979) and reoriented the colonial object as the recipient of modernization's neocolonial mantra (Adams, 1992; Rostow, 1960). When combined with a “positivist epistemological dominance” (Haque et al., 2021, p. 345) and a Cold War imperative for newly independent states to declare sides, fulsome consideration of how local contexts, histories and alternative epistemological origins might construct post-colonial administrative states was pushed to the disciplinary sideline.

In living (without) color

In his self-described “spoil sport” critique of the public administration discipline, Nisar (2022, p. 1) noted how some public administration scholars have declared that now “the time for decolonization of public administration has apparently come.” This exuberant call arises from hegemonic intellectuals who have suddenly “awakened” to public administration's “ugly underbelly” (Nisar, 2022, p. 1). And, yet, we know how decades of non-West scholars have been sidelined, told that their work is of peripheral concern or, if they are lucky, be given a seat at a table in a room where the “other” sit and not a seat at the (American) disciplinary table. As such, it is no surprise (to non-West scholars) when Nisar (2022, p. 2) rightfully asked whether “we should be grateful and pretend that they have ‘discovered’ decolonization just like a continent full of people was discovered a few hundred years earlier by an incompetent voyager.” The answer is neither simple nor easy.

To start answering this question, we must define our target audience. If the “we” are those who are born within, proactively live within, and/or write outside (neo)colonial or

hegemonic mindsets, then let's ask: Who are *our* objects and *our* subjects? If our audience for this essay is our friends who persistently knock on the door of hegemonic intellectuals, does this new Americanist predilection become *our* object of curiosity? It is, but only partially. As any scholar of non-West administration knows, we may only survive the journal review process if we reference and build upon literature from the self-chosen favored child of the discipline: American Public Administration. We are used to having to learn American literature so that we may write about another country - even if that literature may not add value to our research. We may know the literature and its systemic biases and oversights better than those who write such scholarship.

So, when the hegemonic intellectuals declare decolonization as a goal, our burden appears heavy. That is, we may worry that contextualized, historical and reflective scholarship will become subsumed to the newest Americanist angle in which "others" (our object as non-West PA) want to learn but are unwilling to listen. This is not an invalid concern. The declaration of decolonization as a new trend (by hegemonic intellectuals) does not remove hegemonic intellectualism. We are unable to declare the methodological Americanists as *our object*. Despite outnumbering the *N* of 1 Americanist literature, those outside the West do not hold disciplinary power. The desired response to the Americanist call for decolonization is not colonization by the "other." What hegemonic intellectuals appear to desire is decolonization *but on American terms*.

That is, when hegemonic intellectuals newly seek to "decolonize," will the long-time observers of (neo)colonial administrative behaviors sit at the disciplinary table? Or does hegemony repeat itself? That is, the West has declared the decolonial subject as interesting and, therefore, the decolonization train speeds toward its West-described destination. In this version, limited care is given to what existed before the train changed its path, as if prior developments were neutral and contributed nothing to the changing of the path. Indeed, which substantive barriers are already known to limit effective train progression, which locally constructed cultural and historical concepts positively influence non-West administration, and which stops along the way are overlooked?

If one asks an American why its academic conferences with a partial or full focus on social equity largely engage only a tiny minority (American citizens, that is) of the world population, the defense often revolves around their (newly) primary need to engage structural injustices within public administration by which they mean, *American* public administration. The non-American "other" or its felt structural injustices have no place at this table. The "other" in this case is neither subject nor object, it is simply not invited. If such scholars, a group ostensibly more interested in uprooting systemic injustice and disciplinary negligence than the average scholar, do not recognize their own hegemonic intellectualism, then the spoil-sport concerns are not far off (Nisar, 2022). Counternarratives within public administration's discussion of social equity in the United States are not, by default, counternarratives abroad. Americans cannot forget that the racial history of the United States is neither representative of nor a determinant of the rest of the world (Moloney, Sanabria-Pulido, & Demircioglu, 2022).

In an extension of such ideas, Santis (2022, p. 134) writes that "it is not enough to deny conversations about oppression and otherness in favor of absolution through abstract proclamations of social equity." Proclaiming an updated social equity emphasis

for a methodologically American discipline cannot be *de facto* extended outside of America. Not only have non-Americanist scholars long observed inequities via colonial administration but have continually observed the ongoing presence of inequity in a seemingly post-colonial world.

In a metaphor carried throughout his article, Santis (2022) explains how the universalist will attempt to teach the nonwhite “other” that he or she is not a color but a human. Upon graduation, this newly colorless human optimistically jaunts into the world. But soon, the teacher’s naivete becomes obvious. If the way in which the nonwhite student is “made to feel otherness” by society is not understood, or if the “Other’s discourse, gaze, judgment, and systems of oppression perpetuate otherness” (with purposeful capital “O” and small “o”) (Santis, 2022, p. 136), then what has been achieved? The answer is: little. The student was right. Abstract proclamations and ongoing exclusions are simply reminders of where disciplinary power sits.

Santis (2022, p. 136) continued: if “authentic discourse is contingent on ‘listening,’ then the burden of openness and confronting otherness is placed on the other and their ability to talk. And if authentic discourse is contingent on ‘receiving the other as one-self,’ then the burden of confronting otherness is placed on the other and their ability to give.” So, given this observed reality, what can be done? We may concur with suggestions that “it should not be incumbent upon those outside the geographic gate to demonstrate their value while the benefits of *N* of 1 (or *N* of West) studies are automatically assumed as valuable” (Moloney et al., 2022, pp. 3–4). Indeed, without redesigning the table, its creators, and its methods (Nisar, 2022; Santis, 2022), disciplinary progress is limited.³

Avoid senility by living in color

If the reader is not careful, our analysis may unintentionally create a discouraging outlook. It is true that the administrative discipline may not realize its hegemonic intellectualism or even know how to create a world in which methodological Americanism is downsized into just one of several perspectives. But change is possible. We believe knowledge can be meaningful, that it is colorful, the directionalities of knowledge are multiple and context drives what is an “appropriate and meaningful way of knowing” (Wessels, 2021, p. 432).

To get there, choices matter. It is not easy. In our personal relationships, it is often said that change is impossible if one’s own culpabilities are not recognized. Recipients of a partner’s negative behavioral patterns may not recognize his or her poor behavior or, if they did, be potentially unable to articulate a choice away from unhealthy relations. In the discipline of public administration, the nationally and/or institutionally imposed requirement for non-West scholars to publish in top-ranked journals, to dialogue with the (American) scholarship and to write conference abstracts creates such an unhealthy relationship. That is, the non-West scholar walks on eggshells, he or she carefully uses the language of hegemonic intellectuals simply to have a chance at publication. In doing so, there is a resulting diminishment of local and contextualized knowledge. While the use of hegemonic language need not wholly apply to their local

context, savvy authors know that the American reviewer or editor will perceive that it does fit.

To ignore the hegemonic intellectuals or to choose a healthier interaction carries risk. Risk includes non-publishable work in the top (nearly all American or American-edited) journals and/or contextually relevant articles that are published in less cited journals not due to article quality but because of the false (American) assumption that the knowledge contained within such an article has no bidirectional or multidirectional value to the Americanist. Articles with bi- or multidirectional value include, but are not limited to, discussions of Morocco's *zawāyā* (Chafik & Drechsler, 2022) or Japanese philosophies (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). Will hegemonic intellectuals believe that such articles might teach America something about co-delivery of services or the theory-practice divide? The answer is largely "no." And yet, the rest of the world is often required to "cite America" when writing on other contexts. If the scholarly goal is to understand co-production or the link between public affairs and philosophy in America, the knowledge on the "other" should also influence such writing too. Knowledge is not a one-way street.

Our discipline does have a choice. For the hegemonic intellectual, the potential rewards are not clear at the outset. This is particularly true when "the internal critique of any knowledge system remains blind to the critical perspectives on its periphery" (Nisar & Masood, 2021, p. 2). Leaving this negative cycle for an uncertain future is not for the faint of heart. But the reward is an opportunity to engage less from a minority (US-driven) focus toward the majority of the world's administrative states with creativity, cross-disciplinary thinking, cultural contexts and unique historical roots. Such efforts may lead to new conversations of epistemic nationalism (not of the "methodological Americanism" sub-type) and questions on how far a country's "nationalism" (or "nationalist pique") should go (Candler, 2014, p. 1082; Candler et al., 2010). It is a muddy line between creating a post-colonial administrative state which reflects indigenous considerations and when to marry local considerations with appropriately contextualized regional or international practice (Candler, 2014; Nzewi & Maramura, 2021).

Just as our claim at the start of this special issue introduction is not new, we do not suggest that our desire to encourage multi-way knowledge generation is new. There are many who regularly bang at the door of administrative insularity (Kalantari, 1998; Samier, 2017). They exist within country- or region-focused literatures (Candler, 2014; Noor, 1998; Nzewi & Maramura, 2021; Tapscott, 2021), question what Americans rather narrowly understand as "democracy" (Alkadry, 2002), engage in concept transfers across new geographies that alter how a concept is understood or how administrative state power is revealed (policy transfer article, next issue), or are among the first to engage wholly new topics with administrative relevance (Castillo, 2022; Moloney, 2019; Saguin & Shivakoti, 2022; Santis, 2018). This includes topics that are researched in other disciplines but which have had limited discussion within public administration journals. Examples of the latter include citizenship for sale (Shachar, 2017; Surak, 2021), higher education regionalism (Chou & Ravinet, 2015, 2016, 2017), refugee administration (Steen, 2016), sport administration and its governance (Goodwin & Grix, 2011) and more.

Our double Special Issue is a modest contribution to such articulated debates and an invitation to those interested in the future of the public administration discipline to reshaping the disciplinary table. In this first Issue of two, articles focus on an indigenous concept in Ecuador, question the interaction of administrative burden with *de facto* citizenship in India, posits whether administrative sovereignty exists in Ghana, and considers administrative literatures in the Middle East. While two articles are forceful in their articulation of decolonial administrative and/or epistemic expansions, the other two waver on how much non-Western influence is present (or should be present) within administrative contexts. It is to these four articles that our attention now turns.

This special issue

There is a wellspring of creativity (to use the Esman phrase) among those “who know” and, in doing so, naturally unbind themselves from the metropole and its hegemonic intellectualism. In our 2020 Call for what has become a double issue in this journal (December 2022 and June 2023), we asked authors to “redirect directionalities and objects in administration and policy,” to question the nature of administrative sovereignty, to engage with multiple levels of governance and to question epistemological and ontological assumptions. Across this issue and the next, our authors have achieved one or more of our objectives in each article and, in one case, included each of our Issue desires into one article (Saguin & Shivakoti, 2022).

In the first article for this Special Issue, Castillo questions dominant public administration theories and concepts that originate in the West and are exported to the South through international organizations and international consultants. He interrogates Western epistemologies and paradigms of governance and public administration via an indigenous epistemology *Sumak Kawsay*, which is a “philosophical and spiritual” concept that articulates notions of the good life and represents an indigenous Ecuadorian vision of public administration and governance. The author demonstrates the paradoxes that are evident in the implementation of this indigenous paradigm that was adopted into Ecuador’s Constitution and has become a fundamentally state-driven objective.

In presenting an indigenous alternative in which participatory methods of governance, interconnectedness, and the role of a pluri-national state are emphasized, Castillo makes a convincing case for reorienting public policies and systems of governance toward human well-being. In doing so, he challenges the neoliberal model of government and its ideals, which have done more harm than good to Ecuadorians and to ordinary people in the global South. The author’s case study highlights the importance of employing homegrown, alternative paradigms of public administration grounded in complex socio-cultural, historical, political and economic realities. Focusing specifically on the Quechua concept of *Sumak Kawsay*, Castillo highlights how indigenous paradigms can be implemented, noting the particular importance of community, participation, a pluri-national state that respects citizens’ autonomy as well as open communication in policy formation processes. In doing so, he provides critical lessons for countries seeking to actualize, build support for and incorporate a local vision of governance.

The article raises questions for future research and practice, especially in relation to the development and implementation of indigenous paradigms of public administration. This includes (a) how policy and administrative scholars may encourage the publication of knowledge production from and through the global South, (b) which principles of *Sumak Kawsay* can be transferred not only to another global South country but as importantly, challenge the knowledge unidirectionality of our discipline and inform administrative systems in the West, and (c) how do external forces and internal politics affect successful implementation of indigenous paradigms of governance.

In the second article, Yerramsetti, Soni and Mali explore the citizenships of marginalized groups within India and, in particular, how Indians who lack *de facto* citizenship respond to administrative burdens. Via a case study of Indian responses to the government's COVID-19 regulations, the authors described how the poor returned by foot to their place of abode, leaving the cities to which they had previously migrated to increase their chances of economic survival.

Yerramsetti, Soni and Mali seek to fill a gap in studies on citizenship and public administration by focusing on administrative burdens and how policy feedback alters behaviors. While some scholars have examined questions related to the causes and effects of administrative burdens, only a few have “documented or analyzed how citizens respond to or cope with burdensome policies and behaviors” (Masood & Nisar, 2021, p. 56). The authors theorize that individual responses to administrative burdens will vary according to levels of human capital. That is, according to their *de facto* citizenship status. Groups that have low human capital will more likely disengage from public policies while those with high human capital will respond differently, including mobilization to oppose government policies.

The authors use their case study to provide a non-Western interpretive lens for assessing the intersection of administrative burdens with policy feedback and, unique to India, *de facto* citizenship. In doing so, they help articulate how alternative epistemologies and ontological approaches shape how individuals experience the state. The authors' case study of India demonstrates myriad factors, including costs, the nature of rules—whether they are inclusive or exclusive—individual impacts, human capital, and citizenship status that influence the extent of burdens people face and their response.

Although many Indians actively disengaged from a COVID-19 policy that sought to restrict movement and prevent the spread of the virus, once this policy was removed, and livelihood was no longer threatened, normal migration patterns commenced. This raises questions about (a) when, where and why citizens might actively disengage or disregard public policy and its burdens, (b) does disengagement risk cause the administrative state to approach public policy in a meaningfully different way, and (c) what are the lessons for the Indian government about the dangers of unequal citizenship?

In the third article, Schomaker and Huck take us on a stroll through the landscape of the public administration scholarship on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The authors reviewed MENA research in public administration journals (in English) published between 1945 and 2019 and supplemented this review with a survey of academics in the region concerning their publishing activities. In contrast to scholarship published on Latin America and Asia, Schomaker and Huck found that MENA scholarship has not been led by MENA authors. Looking at the thematic scope, they

noted that the publications covered a limited range of topics and sectors: e-government, digitalization, education policy, social policy and environmental policy. The main take-away is that their analysis revealed restrictions in terms of the size, scope and thematic range of the publications—in particular when compared to those published *in* and *about* Eastern and Central Europe. Through their survey, Schomaker and Huck found that about “25% of the respondents publish only or mainly in Arabic” and thus are “rarely represented in internationally accessible languages.”

The article offers valuable lessons for those interested in reshaping the disciplinary table in public administration. This includes how policy and administrative scholars could contribute to expanding existing knowledge on world regions by incorporating publications not published in English or, in this case, published in Arabic. More importantly, this observation suggests that we, as public administration scholars, may need to go outside of our comfort zone and delve into the field to produce knowledge. For instance, in their field-intensive research comparing European and Southeast Asian higher education policy cooperation, Chou and Ravinet (2017) showed that knowledge exists—in abundance—about non-West world regions, but such knowledge has largely been presented to English-reading audiences through a “more or less” interpretive lens (i.e., policy cooperation or administrative structures are “less” in comparison to those in the West) rather than differences in *kind*, which they document in detail. Understanding how and why policy dynamics and administrative structures may be rather distinct in non-West world regions so as to accommodate differences only add to our knowledge about how complexity is administratively reconciled. Schomaker and Huck’s observation that MENA scholarship is underwhelming in comparison to those on Eastern and Central Europe points to the important role that research funders (e.g., the European Commission) play in shaping the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. Decisions concerning which research are funded affect the “knowable.”

In the fourth article, Ohemeng and Foli acknowledge the usefulness of the administrative sovereignty concept. They use the concept as an analytical tool to discuss the growth and deepening of transnational administration while applying a historical institutionalist framework to gather and to examine the concatenation of administrative reforms in Ghana’s pre- and post-colonial eras. They argue there is an “illusion” or nonexistence of administrative sovereignty in Ghana. The source of their data includes historical record and documentary evidence.

The article did not seek to prove a hypothesis but, instead, to provide descriptive evidence to suggest whether Ghana possesses administrative sovereignty. In doing so, the authors contribute to knowledge on the administrative history of Ghana by effectively employing the historical record reviewed to show that (a) a majority of administrative reforms attempted by Ghana have failed due to insufficient administrative capacities and (b) a possible lack of analytical skills in the public bureaucracy due to a malaise inherited from the colonial experience. Ohemeng and Foli spent considerable effort in reviewing the history of state formation in Ghana and identified how the colonial state never intended to develop the administrative capacities of the colonized. Instead, the colonizers’ attention was focused on establishing extractive capacities and developing linkages between the Ghanaian economy and the colonial metropole, a development which has continued to hamstring Ghana’s post-colonial efforts at building an effective bureaucracy. If administrative sovereignty did not exist under colonialism, the authors suggest that its

administrative sovereignty remains weak in the post-colonial era too. Ohemeng and Foli point to the ongoing presence of transnational institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in economic management and administrative reforms.

The case study of Ghana poses questions concerning (a) the relationship between who designs and implements reforms in a post-colonial administrative setting and policy effectiveness, (b) the role of international organizations in supporting or undermining administrative sovereignty, and (c) whether early political independence translates to capacity in shedding (neo)colonial institutional structures?

In conclusion: Color on the horizon

In this first of two Special Issues, we introduced the concept of methodological Americanism to describe and explain the epistemological sickness of (American) public administration discipline. Methodological Americanism is defined by a preoccupation of the state as the main and worthy unit of analysis (methodological nationalism) and questions the central role that racist and/or (neo)colonial thinking plays in studies of public administration (methodological Whiteness). We showed how methodological Americanism in the public administration discipline could result in “postmature senility” if left unchecked. We believe that reshaping the disciplinary table through epistemological diversity is a way forward to ensuring the continual relevance of the public administration discipline. In the next Special Issue, we will look toward the horizon to see how we may go *beyond* methodological Americanism to shape the disciplinary table.

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Notes

1. This quote was directed toward the discipline of international security. But if we remove the word “security” from the quote and add “America” to “Europe,” the sentiment applies to the public administration discipline.
2. As noted by Heidelberg (2018, p. 39), “...debates over epistemology in the field of public administration show less concern over the question ‘what is knowledge’ and more concern over what we are doing with what we profess to know.” We are emphasizing the opposite. That is, the “what is knowledge” has been so narrowly defined that we may not have nearly enough disciplinary knowledge to know what we are doing.
3. Or, as Nisar (2022, p. 4) wrote, “as long as the governing logics of public administration remain unchanged, gatekeepers of the empire can keep publishing one ‘decolonizing’ article in every issue for the rest of their lives but it will not make a meaningful difference to the overall disciplinary logics of exclusion and erasure.”

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