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ARTICLE



Towards a Beirut School of critical security studies

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ABSTRACT

This collectively written work offers a map of our ongoing efforts to work through critical approaches to the study of security and global politics with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa, engaging both experiences and voices of scholars from and working in the region. The unique contribution of the project, we suggest, is threefold. First, we reflect on our commitment to decolonial pedagogy, and how our collective experiences organising a Beirut-based summer school on critical security studies for graduate students and junior scholars living and working in West Asia, North Africa, and the Levant are shaping the project. Second, we affirm and extend the contributions that postcolonial international relations and critical approaches to security have made to scholarship on the region, and to our own work. Third, we take inspiration from the C.A.S.E. collective's interest in 'security traps' and address how and to what extent security discourse may risk colonising other fields in the pursuit of interdisciplinary scholarship. The article concludes with a transition to individual reflections by the authors to highlight the plurality of approaches to the project.

Keywords

critical security studies;
critical pedagogy;
securitisation; Middle East;
international relations;
postcolonial theory

This collectively written work offers a map of our ongoing efforts to work through critical approaches to the study of security and global politics with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa, engaging both experiences and voices of scholars from and working in the region. We discuss some of our intellectual foundations, methodological contributions as well as some of the challenges we have encountered in this collaborative project. Its unique contribution, we suggest, is threefold. First, we reflect on our commitment to decolonial pedagogy, and how our experiences organising a Beirut-based summer school on critical security studies for graduate students and junior scholars living and working in West Asia, North Africa, and the Levant are shaping our experience with this work. In particular, we address how we take up the politics of language and translation as a component of what we hope makes the project critical, and how we draw upon theoretical contributions outside the western canon in an effort

to negotiate these tensions. Second, we strive to affirm and extend the contributions that postcolonial international relations and critical approaches to understanding security have made to scholarship on the region, and to our own work. Third, we take inspiration from the C.A.S.E. collective's interest in 'security traps' and address how and to what extent discourses on security may risk colonising other fields in the pursuit of interdisciplinary scholarship. In the last section, we transition from collective to individual reflections as an introduction to the different languages and approaches that have informed our unique contributions to this project.

As scholars who traverse security studies and Middle East politics, we are often tasked with the 'double burden' of responding to the largely neglected and destabilising effects of external interventions that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of those who bear their consequences, while also attempting to understand and articulate the materialisation of new security concerns, dynamics, spaces, and affects that adequately respond to the contemporary world. The weight of Cold War bipolarity and Anglo-American policy interests tend to constrain the field of possibility for thinking about questions of security and insecurity in the Middle East, where security is often framed preemptively by discourses that centre on well-rehearsed framings of sectarianism, conflict, underdevelopment and terrorism. Further, the isolation of critical theory and interpretivist methods through the structuring of grants and funding is reproduced through a continued emphasis on hegemonic interpretations of what is 'policy relevant' for the Middle East (see Wedeen 2016). We are also motivated by the development of concept building and pedagogical practices through situated praxis, rather than starting or ending with a set of premises or principles on how critical security studies could be applied to regional cases, or its concepts translated into other languages in order to make theory '*fit*' in non-Western contexts (Bilgin 2011; cited in Wæver 2011). Inspired by the ways in which postcolonial IR have opened up spaces for the development of theory building and critical pedagogy among interlocutors living and working outside the Anglosphere (Grovoqui 1996, 2016; Shilliam 2015; Krishna 2009; Spivak 1988, 2012), we are interested in how to expand the plurality of approaches to and perspectives on in/security that the subfield of critical security studies seeks to proliferate.

The article begins with a discussion of some of the creative exchanges that have emerged from the Arab Council for the Social Sciences-funded and Beirut-based Summer Institute on Critical Security Studies in the Arab Region. These discussions provided important new insights for us in terms of active engagements in international politics and, we believe, lend themselves to broader debates about the role of security intellectuals, questions of language and translation and how concepts, experiences, professional aspirations and other cultural codes travel across communities and geographies. Next, we provide a brief overview of some important contributions that have taken up the problem of the 'Middle East' as an object of knowledge in IR. Much has been written about the troubled logic of clustering numerous and diverse countries together such as Iran, Yemen, Tunisia, Lebanon, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates into a single geographical entity (Schwedler and Gerner 2008; Amanat 2012), and to which North Africa is often loosely added. Many justifications have also been made for the continued use of the term 'Middle East' based on shared historical experiences of colonialism and the spread of Islam. As Pinar Bilgin (2004) notes, 'the "Middle East" persists as a problem of language that is inescapable in a project involving the deconstruction of existing

representations of world politics' (citing Wigen and Lewis, 1997). Sankaran Krishna articulates a similar problem of language in talking about the non-West in non-Eurocentric terms more generally insofar as the very spatial category 'non-West' is "already inflected, and indeed constituted, by the West" (2017; see also Nandy 1989). We do not attempt to resolve this 'irredeemable plurality' (Dalby and Tuathail 2002 p. 3) of geography, culture and language here. Rather than suggest a new paradigm for theorising security, our aim is to suggest alternative ways of studying security against the grain of European research agendas or 'schools' (see Wæver 2004; cited in C.A.S.E. Collective 2006). Our program, while heterogenous, finds its collective affinity in a position against a version of security studies and its attendant 'terrorology industries' that resonates all too well with certain forms of exceptionalism and narrow national interests (Amar 2011). We wish to contribute instead to existing conversations on theorising security from and/or for the 'non-West' (Wæver 2011), to question some of the parameters for thinking about the translation of concepts and frameworks in these contexts, and to elaborate on a series of encounters with scholarship in the region that has *thought* security in new ways.

Following this, we attempt to engage several issues that have emerged from our collaborations, and in response to some of our interlocutors. This includes the politics of exceptionalism in relation to the project's focus. Nearly half a million people have been killed in Syria since 2011, and 11 million of its 22 million pre-war citizens and permanent residents are internally displaced or are refugees outside Syria. Civilian populations in Yemen have experienced mass losses of life due to armed conflict and disease, with most living in extremely precarious conditions at subsistence levels (UNOG 2018; UNICEF 2018). These exceptional circumstances have become intense sites of political contestation and violence, leading to rapid transformations in security practices around the world. How does one invoke the category of the exception or uniqueness to draw attention and needed resources that might respond to these crises, while also critically historicising and accounting for the ways in which arguments about regional exceptionalism are used to justify and mobilise a range of violent practices and interventions? We also discuss what it means to extend discourses of security to other fields of research and practice by folding other disciplines and empirical examples into our work on security. We find this problem particularly important to examine, as we consider ourselves interdisciplinary scholars and work across a number of fields to engage problems of security in more nuanced ways. Here we discuss what the C.A.S.E. Collective has referred to as the 'security trap', or the process of securitising other fields as its own form of politicisation, and the attendant possibility of foreclosing other political options for contending with these issues (C.A.S.E. Collective 2006, p. 460–61). In the final section, we break from the collective voice and articulate individual reflections on different political and theoretical orientations that have inspired our approach to this project thus far. We thank the Arab Council for the Social Sciences for their generous support of the project and *Critical Studies on Security* for providing us with the opportunity to advance this discussion in the journal.

Beginnings and trajectories

The idea of a Beirut 'school' of critical security studies evolved as a transnational process with several networks connected through the Eastern Mediterranean city of Beirut.

Brought together and supported by the ACSS,¹ the collective began as a group of Arab and non-Arab scholars based in Beirut, and affiliated with institutions such as the American University of Beirut and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), as well as Arab and non-Arab scholars whose work critically addressed issues of security in Lebanon. These scholars shared in common encounters with the lived experiences of insecurity and precarity in Lebanon, an intimate knowledge of the complex dynamics of contentious politics within the country's pluralistic political environment, and an interest in engaging in scholarly knowledge production about the political construction of security across North American, European, and regionally – based institutions. From this core, the project has expanded to include scholars from or working across the region with similar concerns centering on questions of in/security, and the possibilities and limitations of engaging these questions critically.

The overarching commitment among contributors to this project has been to broaden the dialogue on how security and insecurity are experienced in the region, and how scholars, writers, community organisers and other knowledge producers might proliferate the spaces where those who often find themselves the 'object' of research can articulate their experiences, histories and struggles in their own words, and on their own terms. This does not mean simply imparting concepts and tools drawn from critical security studies onto regional security issues, or to more competently articulate these issues within the existing language of fields. Instead, we are interested in engaging and experimenting with research and pedagogical practices that centre on the active dynamics of translation, and how the concepts and frameworks used to mark a 'critical' agenda travel, mutate and sometimes fail to capture the relationships and experiences one may wish to understand or express.

To this end, we have sought to develop collaborative questions and practices among our interlocutors, rather than starting or ending with a set of premises or principles on how critical security studies on or in the Middle East or Arab world should be done. This was one of our inspirations for creating a Summer Institute on Critical Security Studies in 2017. A shared commitment among the collective was to directly engage with the issue that while current critical scholarship on security emphasises the need to include more voices from outside the Anglosphere and from the global South, these concerns do not often translate into concrete practices that address the structural barriers to proliferating such engagements in more thoughtful ways (see Ashley and Walker 1990).

Work in postcolonial and feminist IR has made substantive contributions here (Grovgui 1996, 2016; Shilliam 2015; Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Chowdhry and Nair 2013; Stoler 2002; Charrad 2001; Amar 2011; Vitalis 2015), as have organisations like the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, which focuses on addressing the need for and challenges of promoting placed-based social science research from the region (Shami 2015). As we sought to try to articulate and attend to what we noticed as the relative dearth of critical approaches to security from a regional perspective in the literature, we wanted to stage more encounters with students and scholars already writing, thinking and actively engaging critically with the politics of security outside the disciplinary spaces and languages that frequently mark them as such. The problem we found was not the lack of critical interlocutors, but that previous schools have failed to focus on developing critical pedagogical approaches that would allow for the

proliferation of these interlocutors in the first place. Relatedly, students and scholars already thinking and writing security often have to find alternative languages for describing their work due to professional and other concerns.

The focus on active processes of translation reorganised the substance of the school away from a relationship of tutelage, and toward more horizontal encounters with concepts, frameworks, methods and languages that had situated meaning for the people using them. This created opportunities in the school for participants to do their own theorising, and to articulate their versions of in/security in conversation with but also outside the CSS literature. One provocative exchange during the first Summer Institute centred on what it would mean to speak of an 'Arab' security studies, and what this might include or exclude as a conceptual framework. We invited students to work through this with us, expressing some of our own enthusiasms and hesitations. One of our doctoral students, Ali Musleh, drew from the work of Palestinian composer Habib Hassan Touma to suggest thinking of this particular signifier the context of the *maqam*. Touma writes, 'Characteristic of *maqam* performance are the long pauses that split up the melodic line into several melodic passages. Every *maqam* is composed of several such melodic passages during which the tonal-spatial aspect is more fully developed. In each new melodic passage, something musically new happens. The new event is either treated independently or combined with musical material that has previously been presented' (Touma 2003, p. 39). In Musleh's reading, if musical forms (also disciplinary concepts, identities, etc.) do travel, it is because of the ability of the musician or scholar to turn encounters into creative events that inspire new interpretations and understandings. This and other insights provided by our students invited further reflection during the session on the performance of 'Arabness' through the structuring of an encounter with the question of security across both Arabic and English language, across cultural references, and how the idea of 'Arab' security studies negotiated a relational restructuring of the subject that exceeded static explanations of identity formation. One might wish to connect this suggestion to contrapuntal analysis developed by Edward Said (2012) from a term in classical music, and taken up by Bilgin (2016) in their work on critical security studies and postcolonial studies.

To give another example, insofar as we wanted the school to engage modes of decolonisation in practice, we invited contributions in both Arabic and English as a way of challenging the linguistic imperialism of the latter. Panel sessions and individual presentations were conducted in Arabic and English, and translators were available for participants who were not conversant in both. This dynamic produced some challenges, but also many pluralistic exchanges and expressions of generosity that could not have been anticipated. For example, the movement between Arabic and English, and also between different regional dialects, created experiences of disorientation which were distributed among faculty as well as students. One inspiring moment occurred on the last day of the institute, where circumstances prevented our translators from being able to attend the panel sessions. At one point, our bi/multilingual students spontaneously and without prompting got up and began moving about the room, whispering translations for students and instructors who could understand only English or Arabic, intuitively taking turns with one another after a few minutes to allow their colleagues to rest and absorb the sessions. As Rey Chow has argued elsewhere, these kinds of exchanges highlight the arbitrary nature of European languages as the dominant languages from

which theories are constructed and relationships are built. Further, it is not only language, but also 'accent, tone, texture, habit... and even things unsaid [that] bear on the transactions of meaning' (Chow 2008, p. 568). This intimate, collaborative and generous act, for us, demonstrated an ethos that we strive to endeavour in our work within and beyond the institute.

The prioritisation of Arab voices is not to render Arabic, or the stories of those who identify as Arab, Egyptian, Christian, Muslim, Lebanese or a particular gender more easily consumable by IR, security studies or policy makers. Decolonial encounters are meant to shed light on and experiment with disrupting the ways in which some language systems are recognised and measured against others. The uneven ascription of value and validity in scholarship to Arabic and English, but also between Juba, Derja and Levantine Arabic is something that we can think of in terms of global power relations, and also how the crafting of knowledge in new ways and on different terms can complicate what we assume to be the centers of knowledgeproduction. For this collective, the question of translation is always already critical in its implication. Thus, our emphasis is not on a set of tools or a recipe for what makes things critical in a regional context, but rather we propose an investment in the pedagogical practices and opportunities that make it possible to have a critical world.

Concepts, traditions and translations

Given how the range of our empirical research has come to bear upon our own theorising, it is difficult to ascribe this project any one particular intellectual trajectory. That said, we locate strands of shared thinking in the challenge posed by postcolonial thinking (Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Mbembe 2001; Bhabha 2012; Fanon 2007, 2008) and variants of IR that sought to challenge the Middle East's exceptional status in the world order by using regional cases to build upon or otherwise engage IR theory (see Walt 1987; Barnett 1998). This latter work sought to emphasise the overlap between domestic, transnational and geopolitical factors in the making of Middle East IR through a sustained critique of realism's obsession with external material threats, and its underlying assumption of the state as a unitary rational actor (see Hudson 2005; Salloukh and Brynen 2004; Gause III 2009). Related work has sought to disorganise the emphasis on external military threats in analyses of insecurity towards the imperatives of socio-economic development (Brand 1995; Korany, Noble and Brynen 1993); to examine Marxist and Gramscian understandings of hierarchical structures of global politics through constructivist understandings of the role of identity in patterns of state building (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002; Hinnebusch 2010) and to use historical sociology to 'map' the IR of the Middle East in relation to colonialism, Cold War politics and neoliberal globalisation (Halliday 2005).

Drawing upon these and other contributions to speak more directly to the field of security studies, Barkawi and Laffey's (2006) critique of the Eurocentrism that saturates conventional studies of security and the preoccupation with great power agency suggests ways to acknowledge and foster histories of security relations, past and present, through a co-constitutive – although never egalitarian – set of relations between European and non-European worlds. Bilgin's (2011, 2015, 2016) work on the persistence of parochialism in security studies, and its intersection with

Middle East area studies, as well as Hazbun's (2015) discussion of the disjuncture between understandings of the security interests of state elites in the region and the experiences of insecurity attributed to a broad matrix of social actors are included among related engagements.

We can add to this expanding archive Paul Amar's work on Egypt as a human-security state (Amar 2013); Abboud's work on the complexity of international and regional power struggles during the Syrian civil war (Abboud 2015); Abboud and Muller's (2016) writings on Hizballah and the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon; Omar Dahi's work on the political economy of the Arab revolts (Dahi 2011; Dahi and Munif 2012); Khalili's (2012) work on liberal counterinsurgencies as well as Grove's (2015, 2017) work on crowd technologies and processes of securitisation in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. These co-constitutive or 'contrapuntal' readings of security (Pasmazoglu 1997; Chowdhry 2007; Salter 2010) provoke questions of war and peace in new ways. They reject the idea of regional security practices as being simply derivative or unworthy of analyses on their own terms (Barkawi and Laffey 2006, p. 332), and also challenge the normalisation of Euro-American experiences and interests as central to the ways in which global politics must be understood (Mitchell 2005; Mufti 2005; Hobson 2012). Such approaches encourage spatialisations and periodisations of global politics that challenge and provide an alternative to temporal geographies that serve to diminish or peripheralise the experiences of those who are most affected by colonial and imperial legacies and their contemporary manifestations (Gregory 2004; Mitchell 2002).

We concur with Salter and Mutlu (2013) that the plurality of approaches to critical security studies lend themselves to 'localize[d] understandings of security and insecurity, while retaining an openness to the empirical field upon which these inquiries can be based' (pg. 2). Recent contributions to their collection on the various 'turns' in critical approaches to the study of security present productive sites from which to theorise recent political upheavals, new technologies and subjects of security and how novel practices and techniques of securitisation intersect with discourses of dispossession. One of the tasks we have put forward for ourselves is to think about how this plurality of approaches can be engaged in collaboration with some of the historically – specific and place-based commitments we have touched on here. One possible trajectory is to consider how such approaches might fold in even more diverse political imaginaries to include, for example, Arab nationalists, socialists, Islamists, 'Ottomanists' and secular nationalists, and even early Muslim, Christian and Jewish thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun, whose views have been engaged elsewhere to open up alternative ways of conceiving of the possibilities of global politics (Hurd 2009; Euben 2008; Bilgin 2016).

Further, the emphasis on localised understandings of in/security in combination with an openness to empirical 'fields' raises a number of challenges and also opportunities for imagining the politics of security in different ways. Sources of insecurity may proliferate at the same sites of resistance around new social movements and on/offline activism that amplify countervailing voices around issues of gender, social justice, conflict and environmental degradation. New techniques and technologies of security are reshaping the way the region is configured, transformed and made amenable to multi-scalar forms of interventionism. Even events that seem novel or unprecedented overlap with pre-existing forms of control with unpredictably mutational effects. As emerging state and regional powers and multinational corporations exercise political and military influence

through old and new media, think tanks and other forms of cultural production to rationalise evolving alliances alongside foreign and domestic policies, new spaces of possibility are formed and deformed. For example, data generated from everyday exchanges online are increasingly incorporated into the organisation of global security apparatuses focused a range of issues, from global finance, to border management and the governance of contemporary mobilities, to new technologies and regimes of surveillance.

As these infrastructures open up new directions for research, new spaces of knowledge production and new means for connecting and communicating with diverse populations, they also proliferate other opportunities for the production of questionable analyses and forms of 'expertise'. To put another way, information and communications technologies and the globalisation of data and metrics as 'neutral' forms of measurement present new twists on recalcitrant problems of neocolonialism that are not ameliorated through the simple addition of 'on-the-ground' research. By highlighting this tension, we do not seek to resolve it but rather are interested in furthering conversations about how particular political investments traverse law, technicity and politics to enframe new and old models of power, truth and sensibility. This problem speaks to what it means to study security 'from afar', and within networked spaces that co-constitute security practices and knowledges alongside discourses, actions and material conditions that require more sustained, ethical engagements. As such, any critical approach to these issues requires a sustained reflection upon one's own positionality vis-à-vis research and the people and places the researcher encounters. Further, emerging relations between technology and violence require that we remain open to how we define security, as the definition itself is shifting in relation to new forms of information capture and how control is exerted through these infrastructures.

On 'security traps' and the ethics of obfuscation

Like many scholars who engage critical approaches to the study of security, our work follows a range of intellectual directions, including, but not limited to, media studies, cultural studies, critical political economy, anthropology and gender studies to make sense of the worlds we try to describe (for example see Tawil Souri 2007; Mikdashi and Puar 2016). In light of this, one of the challenges of this project has been to try to grapple with some of the ethical imperatives of reading issues and events through security discourses, particularly insofar as they may not intuitively be read as matters of security. Some concerns centre on how to counter the ways in which violence experienced by others becomes a matter of imperialist systems of knowledge production. Relatedly, attaching the signifier of 'security' to particular issues raises important questions about what the C.A.S.E. Collective, in their manifesto, describe as 'security traps', and to what extent interdisciplinarity in security studies discourse may function as a form of 'colonizing' other fields (C.A.S.E. Collective 2006, p. 461). Other concerns focus on the ethical complexities of assuming one is speaking for one's own culture. Edward Said (1989) raised this issue in his writings on the purpose of scholarship and his engagement with the question of expertise, as have a vast number of postcolonial and other critical scholars who have written about the problem of the 'native informant' (Soguk 1993; Spivak 1999; Khan 2005; Malak and Salem 2015; Krishna 2016). While we would not

suggest that these issues are de facto *more* of an imperative for those working or living in the Middle East to account for – such a presumption would gesture too closely toward notions of Oriental despotism or alterity – we do think the concept of the ‘security trap’ must be taken very seriously in a region too often overdetermined by scholars and policy-makers who can only see oil and terrorism.

C.A.S.E. outlines three issues in particular that we find productive in taking up the particularity of our potential security trap. The first is the ‘widening of the security field’, or, as outlined above, ascribing the signifier of ‘security’ to issues that might otherwise not be considered matters of security, for example peace and development, and the potential for these issues to be coopted by government security apparatuses with unintended consequences. A second concern is the promotion of the fallacy that securitising more issues will necessarily lead to greater feelings of safety and the experience of freedom from threat. As C.A.S.E. notes, ‘the politics of maximal security are also politics of maximal anxiety’ (461). The third aspect of the security trap refers to what Jef Huysmans (2002) calls the ‘normative dilemma’ of security studies. Drawing on social constructivist readings of language and an emphasis on the theorisation of power–knowledge relations, Huysmans highlights the mediating function of security discourses as they are mobilised around particular political projects, as well as the articulation of ‘resistance’ around certain security practices. This third dilemma begs the question of why and how we ‘write’ security in the ways that we do, and how our writing itself becomes part of a world-making project that may or may not exceed any emancipatory intentions. What is at stake in considering the security trap is how to interpret security-related problems without reproducing the securitisation of the issue one is addressing or compromising the safety of the people who are implicated, whether in the context of migration (Bigo 2002; Salter 2004; Basham 2018), public sexuality (Amar 2013), the creation of ‘no fly’ lists (Nagra 2017) or Palestinian resistance to Israeli regimes of surveillance (Musleh 2018), to list some examples.

To put these concerns in acute perspective, surveillance, repression and punishment are realities that all members of the collective have had to cultivate a careful awareness of in terms of how we involve others in our research, and how this may or may not put them or ourselves in danger. The torture and murder of Giulio Regini, an Italian doctoral candidate from Cambridge University researching trade unions in Egypt, is one high-profile example of the consequences experienced by countless others for expressing public dissidence or venturing too far into questions that states and security apparatuses consider off limits (Walsh 2017). This is not systematically true across the region and in every circumstance. Further, positionality matters in terms of how the researcher may experience surveillance, access, threat and punishment. Still, in our experience, the act of research itself is often highly politicised, as is the attachment of the signifier ‘security’ to our analyses, and we understand the consequences for traversing the realm of ‘security’ analysis to be potentially arbitrary and severe. As Pascal Menoret writes about his own fieldwork experience in Saudi Arabia, intense repression has an impact on social relations and field research, and the lack of transparency and fairness in the judicial system means that ‘physical punishment, torture, and the threat thereof...are the *ultima ratio* of political acquiescence’ (22). We take this to mean we should not assume the luxury of debating the securitising effects of our research. Given the potential severity of the consequences and high levels of political repression in many of the places we

research, we must engage as if this *is* the case. The question then becomes not whether or not our work participates in the securitisation of particular issues, but how best to research the politics of securitisation in light of this, while continually and carefully assessing the impact of our research at every stage of our projects, even beyond publication (see Fassin 2015). This problem, we would argue, is inescapably present at the heart of any research agenda on security and the region.

If critical security studies provide us with a range of methodological approaches for 'deepening and widening' our understanding of security (Ratelle 2013), and if we understand our research as inherently political (Salter 2013), one area of discussion and debate for us has to think about an ethics of obfuscation as part of a posture of critical inquiry in security studies, and how one might go about selective processes of obfuscation in research without ceding rigor. In other words, if torture or imprisonment are not merely 'frameworks' of analysis or abstract possibilities (Menoret 2014), then the choice to engage in modes of obfuscation or evasion in our writing and speaking is no more ethically or politically dubious, nor should the use of such tactics be considered less rigorous, given the particular contexts, histories and vulnerabilities that we encounter in our research and teaching. Consequently, choosing *not* to write about particular topics or forms of resistance to manifestations of repression, focusing on exposing the nuances of state violence rather than nascent or vulnerable tactics of refusal, or relatedly, choosing to write about these situations in more opaque ways, is not less about the distribution of what is and is not politically legible. We provide no definitive answers here, only hard problems and an invitation to conversation about the purpose of research in relation to struggle.

The collective thoughts we have outlined here deserve more attention and reflection than we are able to untangle in the space provided, but we hope they provide some starting points for further engagement. Rather than offer a new paradigm for *doing* security studies, have tried to focus on the importance of praxis, location and the kinds of moral economies we participate in in our work, as well as the idea that security theories are always already incomplete in their translation and application to different research contexts and lived experiences (see Chow 2008). As we transition to the individual reflections that follow, we hope they highlight the plurality of languages, approaches and literature that we ourselves are inspired by, and have informed our contributions to this project thus far.

Samer Abboud

The framing of the Middle East as a source of global instability has a long trajectory that predates post 9–11 military interventions into the region to shape its security architecture. There has been no shortage of regional security schemes put forth for the Middle East to combat perceived global threats. Even today, the Trump Administration has proposed the formation of an 'Arab N.A.T.O' to combat terrorism and Iranian expansionism, the Western dictated threats *du jour*. The pursuit of such projects has had disastrous consequences for the peoples of the region and not merely the state system as a whole.

One of the central goals of a Beirut School of Security Studies should be to interrogate and historicise such proposals in order to provide a genealogy of how the region gets incorporated (or not) into global frameworks, institutions and discourses of global

security as they have evolved from the colonial past to the colonial present. The Middle East was central to the emergence of regionalism as a model of colonial subjugation, and is therefore a starting point for understanding the legacies of empire and their impacts on world order. The Middle East Supply Center (MESC) was actively discussed within the Anglosphere as a framework for military and economic control of regions, a novel innovation in colonial management for the time that sought to merge and consolidate security and supply control of the colonised by Euro-American powers. Indeed, 'a world of regions' dominated from outside by coalitions of Euro-American colonial patrons was quite possible in the aftermath of World War II as regional organisations materialised differently in areas such as the Caribbean and South Pacific, while plans for similar schemes were proposed for West Africa and the Balkans. These were not uncontested innovations, however. As Omar Dahi notes in his contribution to this Forum, regionalism as a framework has been adapted and appropriated from within the Global South, providing new spaces for the articulation of security.

Tracing the trajectory of colonial-designed regional schemes for the Middle East reveals the long history of changing Western security narratives as well as the multiple forms of resistance employed from within the region against these schemes. From the MESC through to the Baghdad Pact and to Donald Trump's 'Arab N.A.T.O', these externally imposed designs are reflections of imperial legacies to control and shape supply and security architectures of the region. How these schemes are articulated, materialised and resisted have fundamentally shaped world order. As Sherene Saikely has demonstrated in *Men of Capital*, the MESC had profound impacts on the articulation of Palestinian bourgeoisie economic and political interests that shaped the struggle against Zionism. Thus, far from being a neutral supply organisation, the MESC would have serious material impacts in Palestine that would contribute to Palestinian dispossession and displacement.

Such historicised analysis can also serve to help us rethink our understandings of how insecurity is produced at different moments of time and what that may look like for the region. The persistence of solutionism as a way to understand security in the Middle East has meant that security is defined almost exclusively through the state, thus obscuring and obfuscating the ways in which global discourses of insecurity and patterns of intervention have material effects 'on-the-ground'. As I have argued elsewhere (with Benjamin Muller), the Special Tribunal for Lebanon is an excellent example of Western intervention into regional politics that radically shaped individual and communal perceptions of insecurity in Lebanon.

As a collective, we should be interested in the materiality of external patterns of intervention and regional designs, whether in the form of regional organisations or through international legal interventions. These larger patterns of regionalism, war and intervention, whether through tribunals or sanctions, shape insecurity throughout the region and contribute to ongoing instability and conflict. Yet, a collective understanding of this materiality is largely missing. As we pursue such lines of historical inquiry in our research, we hope that thinking substantively and critically about the geographies and histories of security models for the region will provide the space to reject solutionism, interrogate functionalist arguments used to explain regionalism, trace the imperial roots of the current regional order and, most importantly, show how these were experienced and contested from within.

Omar Dahi

A Beirut school of critical IR and security studies can examine processes that other fields have not adequately theorised, and a richer understanding of the forms of regionalisation and cross-regional interaction taking shape and clashing within the global South and the Middle East in particular.

Critical approaches to regionalism and regionalisation focus on de-naturalising regions, and examining the complexity of their driving forces and outcomes away from more mainstream approaches that measure successes and failures of regional integration and ideal institutional forms. The goal of a Beirut School is to speak from the region not just for the region, but for the rest of the world. A critical approach within the region can therefore develop the theoretical tools for understanding a wide variety of regionalisation processes. It includes among other issues, a central role for non-state actors alongside state actors as well as informal and formal processes in driving regionalisation. Bilgin (2004) had demonstrated how notions of regional security are tied to multiple and competing visions of the region, including multiple notions of Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism as well as Euro-Mediterranean relationships.

Large and powerful Southern states are increasingly drawing out their own security frames, pursuing an aggressive and assertive foreign policy accordingly. While this was true of earlier periods, today they are aided by think tanks, media platforms and networks of journalists and intellectuals in and outside the region. Neither the traditional Europe-centric theories of regional integration nor notions that view clashes within the South as derivative of US and European foreign policy are fully adequate to capture, for example, the recent clash within the GCC between Qatar, the KSA and the UAE, Iranian-Saudi regional clashes or Chinese diplomatic, infrastructural and other economic relations in the Arab countries, Turkey and elsewhere.

Thinking of South–South regionalisation on its own terms allows us to restore agency to the global South, both in the positive sense of the history of moral critiques of global political economy that could be traced back to the contributions of the Third World Movement and its critique of nuclear proliferation and calls for disarmament and in the ways that processes in the global South may come to shape modes of governance in both the North and South. For example, Amar (2013) has argued the ‘human security’ state as a mode of governance involving policing and control in the name of moral humanitarian intervention was developed in large semi-peripheral states such as Brazil and Egypt, normalised and spread under the banner of South–South solidarity and internationalised through large multinational conferences tackling issues such as poverty and sexual trafficking within the global South. Ultimately, a process of reflection on regionalism through a critical security studies lens allows us to rethink notions of criticality as well as broadly, political projects of social justice away from the fog of war, structural violence and sectarian polarisation that has now permeated the region.

Waleed Hazbun

The goal of the ‘Beirut School’ is to foster critical IR scholarship from and for the Arab region. This effort requires a structural reorganisation of the existing global system of IR knowledge production. We need new institutions that better reflect the concerns

and experiences of scholars in the region, and more broadly, affiliated with the Global South. David Lake (2016, 1115) has noted that 'Our life experiences shape our intuitions, which in turn guide our theoretical suppositions'. Lake admits that he is 'now aware' that his study of hierarchy in IR was a view from the 'top-down' defined by his privileged social position. His work depicts structures of hierarchy in the international system as voluntary contractual arrangements rather than as coercive forms of dominance. Lake says he considered attempting a study of hierarchy from the 'bottom-up' but figured he would be unable to shed the blinders of his privileged position; it would 'be easier' and 'done better by someone with a different intuition shaped by a less privileged life' (1115). Lake further recognises that the lack of diversity within the academic community of IR scholars has resulted in not only a lack of theoretical diversity in IR but a self-perpetuating centre-periphery structure in the field defined by efforts to police what is considered 'important' as well as what even counts as IR.

Lake's call for diversity, however, is debilitated by his insistence that we need to 'erode' rather than 'overthrow' hierarchy in the field of IR. Lake's support for 'other' views produced by 'less privileged' voices situated at the bottom of a hierarchical order within the academic profession resembles what William E. Connolly identifies as 'microstrategies of academic containment' (Connolly 2002, 39). Connolly explores how mainstream rationalist neorealist and neoliberal scholars sought to portray their theoretical rivals as 'others' whose constructivist, post-structural and feminist approaches that failed to accept the path of marginal, evolutionary critiques of mainstream IR theory were marginalised as irrelevant to IR.

My own motivation for this project developed when I first began teaching at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 2007. My students needed tools for understanding and reacting to having lived through the 2006 War between Israel and Hezbollah as well as the regional consequences of the US invasion of Iraq. Most IR and security studies scholarship about the Middle East has been framed around questions that relate to the security interests and policies of the United States and its allies. This has left scholarship detached from the challenges, threats and interests of the people in the region. I began to focus my own research on identifying the sources of insecurity for different communities in the Arab region and in particular the role US interventions have played in generating insecurity. At the same time, different societal communities often have rival understanding of insecurity, with the state at times viewed as more of a threat than a source of security.

The Beirut School seeks to follow Pinar Bilgin's (2015) suggestion that we need to 'to understand insecurities experienced by various states and non-state actors in the Arab world' (10). Doing so is not about gazing from the top or bottom at an 'other' below or above or simply representing a certain (subaltern) point of view, but rather mapping out a complex, heterogeneous system of diverse rival actors. The 'Beirut School' is not one limited by a certain positionality. Rather, we seek to pluralise IR scholarship, inspired by the work of Edward Said and other broadly postcolonial approaches, refusing to define security relationships in terms of a 'self' we identify with against the threat of an unknown 'other'. Our approach allows us to speak from and about a heterogeneous region to the global community of IR scholarship with its diverse perspectives and interpretative communities.

A useful comparison is to what Robert Vitalis (2015) identifies as the 'Howard School of International Relations'. In the first half of the twentieth century, the field of IR that developed in the United States was preoccupied by the question of how to upgrade the institutions of colonial rule to serve the post-World War I international order (Vitalis 2015, 12). Vitalis identifies a group of African-American scholars based at the historically black Howard University in Washington D.C. as representing the most important centre of opposition to the project of 'white' IR as they highlighted the role of racism in sustaining imperialism. While the Howard School faded due to its exclusion and lack of resources, the goal of the Beirut School is to eventually build an institutional infrastructure for IR knowledge production in and connected to the region – including Ph. D. programs, journals and funding sources – that is more autonomous from the academic hierarchy of IR and eventually foster a constellation of other nodes of across the Global South.

Nicole Sunday Grove

Much of the ethical and practical value of critical approaches to the study of security centre on their ability to stretch and adapt methodologically to the nature of the problems presented, where a diverse and changing world drives methodological development and its application. One undertaking here has been to think generously about how and when the familiar concepts we use to describe colonial histories and imperial formations do the work we want them to do, and where new reformulations are needed to more thoughtfully engage what Ann Stoler has described as the political grammar of colonialism's durable presence (2016, 9). I have found that the deep pluralism of more critical approaches to questions of security and insecurity can be leveraged to hold open spaces for creative thinking inherent to research questions that emerge through reflexive, grounded work. As a member of the collective, and to this end, I strive for a continuity in our efforts driven by investigation rather than an artificial coherence by design.

One possible consideration for the project is how to multiply the spaces and approaches from which one can respond to prescriptive impulses that find their footing in global imperatives of policing and asymmetrical forums of transparency. These imperatives are not simply imposed from an 'outside', but are shaped by an entanglement of state interests, market relationships, military operations, climate affects, communications technologies, labour relations, urban design, economies of desire and other human and more-than-human relations. Framing these connections in my own work has meant experimenting with writing about the sociotechnical relations of security and surveillance practices, how these technologies travel in different contexts and how interventionist capacities of crowd technologies, satellite imagery, mobile technologies, software design and video games interact with objects, bodies and spaces to communicate incipient shifts in biopolitical logics of securitisation. Such an approach does not see objects, technologies or material environments as purely instrumental, nor is it divorced from more abstract theorising at a systemic level.

My engagement with questions regarding the materiality of security has been deeply influenced by the work of Timothy Mitchell, whose exceptional facility for moving between scales captures how extensions of power associated with the 'old capitalist centers' of European colonial expansion and their interaction with modern political

methods recasts and recodes imperial regimes of truth through new technical grammars. Whereas the inside/outside problem of IR has confounded many in the field, I draw inspiration from work like Mitchell's and other's who have been able to find their way from polity to polity, and across borders with an attention to the way that history moves, rather than adhere to the dictates of a particular theoretical or methodological commitment to where the 'action' of international politics takes place. This approach disrupts familiar spatial and temporal scales of analysis, which I think is necessary for recalibrating the security imaginaries that organise even critical work on security around racialised anxieties, the spectre of the terrorist and neoliberal developmentalism. Moreover, it shows how practices of securitisation can correlate to multiple scales beyond local and systemic frameworks, from biometric data to shrapnel fragments, to the architectural constructions of detention centers and satellite and aerial images that create particular optic and sensory registers that would otherwise be invisible to the human eye. Eyal Weizman's (2012) work on forensic architecture in particular also comes to mind here.

Practices and logics of securitisation can also be encountered at other creative, although sometimes opaque registers. For example, Hassan Blasim's work *The Corpse Exhibition* shows how speculative fiction and horror is already *thinking* security in novel ways within the multiple temporalities of conflict zones and development-scapes, but does not quite fit the model of what we tend to mean by 'scholarship'. We might take seriously Arab science fiction and horror as potential sites from which incipient lines of critical security studies are thought, even if these lines of thought have not yet become disciplinarily legible to IR scholars. These interdisciplinary exchanges may present fecund sites for new thinking and research, as these fictional interventions into complex arrays of trauma, memory, violence and flourishing resonate with other work in contemporary security studies today. There is an opportunity for scholars to create encounters between these sites of creative production such that a critical security studies in the region would not merely be adding itself to the list of interesting topics, but is contributing directly to the conceptual innovation necessary for a research agenda to stand on its own.

Coralie Pison Hindawi

The pervasiveness of critical security studies' Western orientation does not mean that this feature is insurmountable, and that the critical approach to security studies has not much to offer to the study of the Arab world – and vice versa. The Arab region is connected in numerous, complex, ways to both the study and practice of security. It has been the focus of countless security concerns, the target of countless security policies, and the region is intrinsically connected to a wide range of security-related discourses. Overall, however, the region itself and its inhabitants have been experiencing extremely high levels of insecurity, not infrequently nurtured – directly or indirectly – by foreign policies justified in terms of security.

Given the exceptionally heavy impact of Western so-called security policies (notably military interventions, transfers of weapons and military goods and counter-terrorism activities) on the Arab region, and the levels of insecurity they produced both in the region and beyond, I consider that the use of expert knowledge to challenge

widespread assumptions (within Western countries) of Western benevolence and efficiency is one of the obvious ways in which critical security scholarship on the region can be useful. Discrepancies between the stated goals of policies and their actual impact tend to be so enormous that one may consider the production of knowledge highlighting these contradictions to be too obvious to be worthwhile. Yet the continuation – when not aggravation – of such policies indicates the ability of certain ‘regimes of truth’ to withstand the most blatant proofs of their inconsistencies. I wrote about this paradox in a short essay on Western arms transfers and arms control policies toward the Middle East (2017). Elsewhere, I dissect the way in which UN Security Council coercive action conducted in the name of maintaining peace and security in the Middle East effectively generated intense levels of human suffering and insecurity for inhabitants of this country and beyond (2016).

I agree with the idea that one of the strengths of critical security studies is its pluralism. While building upon a wide range of literature and methodologies, I also believe that one of the project’s aims should be to produce scholarship rooted in Edward Said’s legacy and focused on ‘the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, and the powerless’, which highlights the paradoxical connection between human insecurities and mainstream discourses of security.

When working on the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), I realised that many critical scholars tended to reject the doctrine as a poorly disguised new version of humanitarian intervention, conveniently instrumentalised to justify – generally Northern states’ – military interventions in Southern countries. Yet such an interpretation of the doctrine fails to acknowledge the fact that a vast majority of Southern states make a very clear distinction between R2P and the doctrine of humanitarian intervention it was precisely designed to replace. In equating R2P with humanitarian intervention, scholars effectively accept the primarily Western interpretation of the R2P doctrine that insists on its military dimension, though this is precisely the doctrine’s most contested aspect for a vast majority of Southern countries. Connecting this aspect of critical knowledge production to Barkawi and Laffey (2006) on postcolonial security studies, I argue that for ‘Melian security studies’ – as I agree critical security studies could be labelled – to essentially ignore the Melian discourse and dismiss its narrative is problematic. Though it appears to denounce Western instrumentalisation of a concept such as R2P, critical work equating R2P with humanitarian intervention actually reinforces the interpretation of the strong and contributes to the overall dismissal of Southern agency. It is paradoxical as many examples document substantial non-Western influences on the very idea of R2P (Acharya 2016), as well as on its more recent interpretation.

With my colleague Karim Makdisi, I have explored in a different field of security studies – that of arms control and disarmament – the intriguing coexistence of seemingly incompatible narratives on the dismantlement by Syria of its chemical weapons program. We reached the conclusion that the coexistence of these narratives was precisely one of the factors explaining the success of the disarmament process in Syria. Such examples underline the need, in my view, for a Beirut School of critical security studies to also take local discourses and narratives seriously and acknowledge their significance.

Jamil Mouawad

One prevailing account in mainstream security studies contends that the state should respond to a Weberian ideal type, whereby states are often seen to be consolidated territorially and institutionally and to enjoy a clear separation between the international and the national on the one hand, and the state and the society on the other. Accordingly, the Arab state was often depicted as an unachieved project. It was either perceived as coercive, hierarchical or strictly representing the interests of a small group, typically a kin or a sectarian one.

Failing consequently to respond to the European model of the nation-state, Weberian and Westphalian, the Arab state was labelled as 'weak', 'absent' or otherwise 'fierce', 'deep' and 'barbarian' or a project 'against the society'. Since the wave of Arab mobilisations in 2011, the state has come under pressure, and is either considered as collapsing or falling apart. In this sense, the state has moved from an unachieved project to a project that requires building anew. The Beirut School clearly, and justifiably, states that static-centred approaches to security are inadequate. Indeed, the state is not solely responsible for providing security. Often the state has also been involved in producing insecurities in order to govern population and specific areas. But being inadequate does not mean one should completely abandon the state and dismiss it for being irrelevant. The point is not to completely turn a blind eye to the state but to outdo its normative interpretation and understanding as a completely autonomous body, sitting above the state and its 'strength' or 'weakness' depends on its ability to penetrate the society.

The Beirut School should present itself against the grain of a dominant narrative, adopted and hailed by several actors – international, national and local – that posits the 'Arab state' as an unachieved project. In addition, while inquiring about the state the Beirut School should not fall into the trap of the rigid and unhelpful classification of state typologies be it 'strong' or 'weak'. In fact, the state in the Arab world remains central to the accumulation of resources and as a site of contestation. Most importantly, the state is alive in people's imaginary and are longing for it as a 'source of justice'. The state imaginary is akin to the Weberian model and surpasses, surprisingly, the Khaldunian model allegedly rooted in the region. The people's experiences with the state have been differentiated and betrays the typologies offered by traditional approaches to the state in the region. How people experience the state – and how this generates demands for a Weberian state – need to be central to our understanding of the role of the state and the production of (in)security more broadly in the region.

Therefore, it is crucial and imperative to question not only the practices of states but mostly the actors who practice the state and act like it. In other words, one should also study empirically how some actors are producing security outside the traditional realm of the state; these actors – according to the Eurocentric model of state-formation – are believed to be 'anti-state' and have for a long time hampered the modern formation of the state in the Arab world (tribes for instance). In many instances, these actors, to borrow from Navaro-Yashin, are 'more stately than the state' itself. In light of the need to move beyond the static understanding of security, this above-mentioned empirical dimension paves the way for yet another theoretical question – or even an ethical one – that it would be important for the Beirut School to address: is security justified no matter who provides it?

Sami Hermez

Anthropology has engaged with questions of security from many disparate angles. Scholars have tackled (in)stability (Greenhouse 2002), uncertainty (Hermez 2017), displacement (Allan 2013), poverty (Elyachar 2005), the body as a site of control and vulnerability (Petee 1994), the future (Bray and Vogt 2016) and precarity (Muehlebach 2013). Much of the literature on the anthropology of the state has also tied in with questions of (in)security. However, what I find enticing in a Beirut School and in thinking critically about the notion of security from within the region is the possibility of collecting and consolidating this work into a body of knowledge that could speak back to circulating discourses of security. The security frame has come to structure our lives and take precedence over other frames like privacy or resistance. Can we subvert this framing? Can we make it speak to people's struggles in the region rather than for, as Mouawad writes in his intervention, the Weberian/Westphalian state? What I would like the Beirut School to focus on are the everyday voices and experiences of people struggling against security apparatuses to reimagine their world. The Beirut school, as I imagine it, is an invitation toward new hope and to engaging in utopian imaginaries as real models for the world.

I would like to push us to think about the microrelations embedded in questions of security and insecurity. How do fear, risk, precarity and instability operate in the daily maneuverings of people's lives, and how are aspiration, hope and well-being achieved and sustained? While power, forms of violence, the state and the law often figure into discussions of security, and while these remain of central concern, exploring everyday (in)security should take people's experiences, understandings and terminologies as starting points for what it means to feel (in)secure and for the strategies people employ to live with some form of insecurity. There are several lines of thought that I am particularly keen on exploring to develop a Beirut School. First, I find it important to consider temporality. When we speak of security, we are more often than not thinking about the future and perhaps longing for the past. Insecurity, and its correlates like precarity, work in and through time. Thus, it is crucial to understand society's relationship to time and the temporal. How do people imagine their security in the past, present and future? How do they remember it?

Second, flow has been a useful anthropological trope and no less so in relation to (in)security. Movement is both a potential source of instability and a means of finding new spaces of security. The flow of goods, services and people is intrinsically tied up with questions of (in)security. How, for example, are refugees and migrants constructing their secure spaces in the absence of state or legal guarantees for their security? How do receiving communities respond to the short and longer-term arrival of other ideas and people? Third, emotions of (in)security can bring us closer to people's embodied experiences. Fear, anxiety, frustration, love and hope are just some affective states that are invoked within social relations in contexts of (in)security. What kinds of emotions do states of security and insecurity engender? How might understanding affect help us to reconsider our relationship to crisis and insecurity? A fourth mode of inquiry is the body. It is a site on which violence can be enacted and a resource for resisting and overcoming insecurity. A focus on the body can further Foucauldian notions of biopolitics and governmentality that are at the core of security considerations. What are the ways in which the body can figure into people's understandings of (in)security?

In thinking about these four concepts, we should not lose site of structural relations, narratives (the telling of stories and engagement with literature – oral and written) and the experiential that can inform critical understandings of security.

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