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Global Epistemologies: Concepts, Methodologies, and Data Systems

Whose Security? Conflict and (Critical) Security Studies in the Middle East and North Africa

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Security Studies (SS) is a subfield of International Relations (IR) concerned with the ways that conflict and violence contribute to shaping the world. The subfield's concern with the conditions of war and peace has situated the state as the referent object of security and produced a state-centrism in scholarship, academic journals, and teaching that overemphasizes security as a policy problem. Beginning in the early 1990s challenges to state-centrism emerged through Human Security (HS) and Critical Security Studies (CSS) approaches that sought to challenge and rethink the referent objects of security while introducing more critical theoretical traditions from which to research, publish, and teach about what constitutes threat and security. These new approaches expanded inquiry into security and oriented scholars around different ways of approaching questions of *what* security is and *for whom (or what)* it is produced. Despite the expansion of the different subfields of inquiry into security, a common criticism levelled at these approaches concerned how regions of the Global South were incorporated into scholarship.

In this reflective essay, I draw inspiration from these criticisms to ask how the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been studied, taught, and theorized from in the fields of Security Studies and Critical Security Studies. The principal question guiding this essay is *What do different traditions in Security Studies have to tell us about conflict in the Middle East and North Africa?* I seek to reflect on how the region, its peoples, and their experiences are incorporated into these fields and how this has shaped scholarly and popular understandings of conflict and peace in the MENA. I wish to reflect on how tensions between the MENA's incorporation into SS and CSS produce patterns of visibility and invisibility. I then shift attention to a discussion of how the emergent scholarship on non-Western IR and other approaches from within the MENA region itself may contribute to different ways of researching and teaching conflict and security in the MENA. The essay concludes with some observations about the future of conflict and security studies in the MENA with an emphasis on key questions that are raised in the context of the region's contemporary overlapping crises.

INTRODUCTION

The seismic political shifts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire through the periods of colonial rule, post-colonial liberation, authoritarian entrenchment, occupation and intervention, and the post-Arab uprisings has produced divergent scholarship on the causes and consequences of conflict in the region. These differing positions depend on how scholars articulate referents of security, their methods of understanding security as a problem and for whom, their understanding of hegemony versus relationality in world politics, the constitutive role (or not) of the colonial experience and its legacies, and the individual, human experiences of conflict amidst rapidly changing political orders. Research into conflict and security in the MENA has produced conflicting worldviews, questions, methods, and analysis. In a historical moment defined by catastrophic, metastasizing crises, it is important to ask what these conflicting approaches tell us about the experiences of security and insecurity in the region.

In my broad, incomplete survey of competing research approaches to conflict and security in the MENA, I aim to centralize the problem of *Whose Security?* as the structur-

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ing question that shapes research and teaching into conflict and security in the MENA. The field of Security Studies is deeply rooted in Euro-American worldviews that centralize the state-centric interests of Western, Global North states as the referent objects of security. How we as scholars and teachers move beyond the field's limitations towards an understanding of how security is localized within the region has been an important motivation behind critical and non-Western approaches to understanding security. Any inquiry into how security is produced - an answer to *Whose Security?* - must necessarily include an understanding of how security for some produces insecurity for others. Our analytical goal then should be to inquire into how people experience others' security as a form of insecurity. Normative approaches that treat state security as the referent, or critical approaches that interrogate the power dynamics behind such state-centrism, fail to provide insight into what living-in-insecurity means for many people within the MENA. I try and show how theoretical and empirical contributions from the Cold War period until today have differentially answered the question of *Whose Security?* and how this has, and has not, provided insight into the experience of insecurity. I am especially interested in how our criteria for what counts as security scholarship often ignores other ways in which ontologies of security are constituted.

The field of Security Studies was the most common approach to understanding global security in the 20th century. As a subfield of International Relations, Security Studies is concerned with the ways that conflict and violence contribute to shaping the world. The subfield's concern with the conditions of war and peace situated the state as the referent object of security. This state-centrism produced scholarship, academic journals, and teaching that emphasized security as a policy problem for states. Moreover, the subfield has been defined by a Big Power bias in which competition among powers is assumed to be the structuring principle of global politics, thus relegating analysis and understanding of formerly colonized states to the peripheries of knowledge production. The development of Security Studies through the politics of Big Powers imbued the subfield with both a state- and Euro-centric character that neglected the study of the Global South, or politically "weak" countries in general, except as they related to the powerful, Global North states. The Cold War gave traction to Security Studies' principal claims about the state as the referent object of security and the insignificance of smaller states to understanding global politics.

Beginning in the early 1990s challenges to state-centrism emerged from within those working in International Relations theories and through new Human Security and Critical Security Studies approaches that sought to rethink the referent objects of security while introducing more critical theoretical traditions from which to research, publish, and teach about what constitutes threat and security. These new approaches expanded inquiry into security and oriented scholars around different ways of approaching questions of *what* security is and *for whom (or what)* it is produced. These approaches sought to displace the state- and Euro-centric character of Security Studies by expanding the scope of what constituted security while at the same time highlighting how International Relations was epistemologically grounded in colonial (Gani and Marshall 2022) and racialized forms of knowledge (Vitalis 2017). Despite the expansion of the different subfields of inquiry into security, a common criticism leveled at these approaches concerned how regions of the Global South were incorporated into scholarship (Greenwood and Wæver 2013).

How each approach to security poses and answers the question of *Whose Security?* is important. I am referring here to the referent object of security, or the thing that should be secured. Security Studies takes the state as the referent object of security, Human Security takes the individual, and Critical Security Studies opens the security field to critique and interrogation by exploring how new security referents emerge within the context of a world defined by hierarchies and power that shape our daily lives. Critical Security Studies thus opens up our understanding of security by posing a number of questions that help us think critically about *Whose Security?*: who can speak in the name of security? For whom is security? What are the outcomes of security practices? Security from whom or what?

In this reflective essay, I draw inspiration from these critical questions around *Whose Security?* to ask how the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been studied, taught, and theorized from within the fields of Security Studies and Critical Security Studies. The principal question guiding this essay is *What do different traditions in Security Studies have to tell us about conflict in the Middle East and North Africa?* I seek to reflect on how the region, its peoples, and their experiences are incorporated into these fields and how this has shaped scholarly and popular understandings of conflict and peace in the MENA. By asking *Whose Security?* I wish to reflect on how tensions between the MENA's incorporation into (Critical) Security Studies produce patterns of visibility and invisibility. A comprehensive undertaking of the relevant literature is impossible in such a short reflection. As such, I take key ideas and texts as exemplars of the approaches I discuss throughout the reflection.

I then shift attention to a discussion of how the emergent scholarship on non-Western IR and other approaches from within the MENA region itself may contribute to different ways of researching and teaching conflict and security in the MENA. The essay concludes with some observations about the future of conflict and security studies in the MENA with an emphasis on key questions that are raised in the context of the region's contemporary overlapping crises.

MENA SECURITY BETWEEN BIG POWER AND REGIONAL POLITICS

One of Edward Said's most enduring contributions to the study of International Relations has been his insistence on the co-constitution of global politics. I am particularly drawn to Said's insights about how to read the world contrapuntally, that is, to see people, places, ideas, and power in relation to each other, and not as distinct categories sep-

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arated by doctrinal lines (Said 1993). Said's critique in *Culture and Imperialism* was aimed at knowledge production that separated the experiences of different groups and denied the co-constitution of global politics that was formed through the colonial experience. Saidian approaches to global politics have sought to inscribe our understanding of global politics with the ongoing realities and legacies of colonial rule by producing knowledge of the world that brings together, rather than separates and excludes, human experience. This intellectual position has directed our attention to that which is excluded, downplayed, peripheralized, and ignored in our understanding of the world. Taking the political and epistemological imperial project of separating and denying co-constitution as the starting point, a contrapuntal reading of the world begins from the idea that global politics are co-constituted. I begin this reflection essay with this reference as an acknowledgement that engaging with what International Relations, as a "very American social science" (Hoffmann 1977), has to tell us about conflict and security in the MENA is severely limited, not simply because of how it incorporates the region into its epistemologies but in how it does not.

Mapping out what constitutes Security Studies, let alone any of its critical variations, is a difficult task given the various traditions and approaches associated with the field. This mapping becomes even more challenging when we try and locate these distinctions in the scholarship on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. At its core, Security Studies is a field interested in the use or threat of military force. The referent object of security was the nation-state and the problem to be explained was why states did or did not engage in war. The main challenge to this approach to Security Studies came from what Cavelty and Balzcaq (2018) call the "wideners"; a group of scholars who sought to include a host of non-military threats, including social, economic, cultural, and environmental risks that states faced. The "deepeners" (Cavelty and Balzcaq 2018) represented another challenge and sought to introduce five new levels of analysis to security studies: international systems, international subsystems, units, subunits, and individuals. As a subfield of International Relations, pluralism from within Security Studies was filtered through the major theoretical approaches dominating the 20th century study of international politics: liberalism, idealism, realist, Neorealist, rationalist, positivist and post-positivist and constructivist. Anyone who has taught or taken a class in an English-speaking university inevitably engages with how these approaches differentially understand global politics. Realism and its variants have been by far the most dominant of these approaches to the study of the international.

Realism is a theory grounded in assumptions about an anarchical, hierarchical international system in which self-contained cohesive units (states) pursue national interests. These interests are presumed to be constant and knowable. War is a structural feature of the international system and occurs when states perceive threats to a balance of power. As a state's insecurity rises, so does the threat of conflict. States in the international system seek to maintain balance of power through acquiring material power that offset threats to state security. Realists posit that this security dilemma determines state behavior in the international system and explains the outbreak of conflict. As a theoretical approach to studying global politics Realism and its offshoots have an implicit policy orientation aimed at understanding threats to national security.

The policy orientation of International Relations scholarship and Cold War era Area Studies programs was perhaps the most consequential development of the post-war period to shape the study of IR in the MENA. Policy-oriented research is principally concerned with identifying problems (and their solutions) in the world. The referents of these problems, their antecedents, or how global hierarchy and the distribution of power had oriented states and societies in the world differently to each other, are never seriously interrogated in most policy-oriented research. Policy-oriented research generally revolved around the specific referents of the United States and its Anglospheric and European allies. That is to say that in general terms what constituted threat and security in the study of International Relations was filtered through the prism of a select few countries that were all settler-colonial or colonial powers. The kinds of research questions, publications, and teaching that emerged from this was decidedly Euro-centric, globalizing Western interests and experiences while provincializing and peripheralizing those of the rest of the world.

The understanding of conflict in the MENA through the lens of Western, specifically American, interests was to epistemologically reproduce global power and hierarchy by rendering the security interests, threats, and referents in terms legible solely to Western interests. There were many critiques aimed at Realism, including its misunderstanding of MENA state structures and state elites, and the neglect of identity and ideational factors in shaping the region's intra-state and global relations (Hinnebusch 2018). Another important critique of how Realism shaped knowledge about conflict and security in the MENA came from within International Relations traditions that sought to shift attention away from the hierarchical international system to regional level analysis. This work broadly sought to understand conflict and security as an outcome of regional orders that were shaped but not determined by Cold War geopolitical divides and shift attention to how regional processes were producing outcomes that had typically been explained through Big Power analysis.

Regional-level analysis shifted attention to how interstate relations shaped conflict and security. This approach was captured in an essay on the study of the Middle East in IR by Fawaz Gerges, who argued that "understanding the region will only come about by looking at it from within rather than from without" (1991, 212). An orientation to study the region from without inevitably subjects analysis to Great Power or imperial politics. Gerges again: "the obsession with the foreign relations of the Great Powers - mainly those of the United States and the Soviet Union - leads to a narrowing of focus and to a minimizing of regional processes which as often as not take a higher priority over international issues in the eyes of Middle East leaders." (1991, 211). Gerges' plea for an IR that saw do-

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mestic, regional, and international entanglements did not fundamentally challenge Realist assumptions about power and hierarchy. What they did, however, was turn our attention to how these were relevant to understanding the formation of regional order.

The shift towards regional or systemic analysis was an important one that positioned the region, however defined, as the unit of analysis that provided explanations for why patterns of war and conflict occurred. Systemic and regional level analysis was important in directing our attention to how intra-regional patterns and state relations shaped conflict but in doing so reproduced some of Realism's core assumptions about how power and hierarchy created conflict. Nevertheless, this work was important in scaling questions of security at the regional level. A corollary to this work emerged from within Constructivist International Relations by placing ideational and identity questions at the heart of understanding regional politics.

One of the most important books to shape constructivist inquiry into the region was Michael Barnett's *Dialogues in Arab Politics* (1998). Barnett's book asks what the relationship is between Arab identity, how Arabs understand Arabism, and an imagined regional order. He delineates four periods in the state system beginning in the Mandate period through to the Gulf War. The changing norms of Arabism during this sixty-plus year period explain intra-state interactions. In making these claims, Barnett de-centered questions of power politics in understanding why conflict occurs and how regional actors define and understand security in favor of ideational approaches that emphasized norms and identity in understanding regional security.

Regionally centered analysis of ideational norms has produced interesting scholarship that shows how ideas about what constitutes the region and how power should be distributed have produced conflict. Pinar Bilgin's work (2015, 2019) directs us to thinking about how competing ideas about the region produce conditions for material conflict. Working within Constructivist and Critical Security Studies traditions, Bilgin's work takes aim at Realism's epistemological hegemony as a starting point for rethinking questions of whose security and for what and whom. Bilgin's version of my question of *Whose Security?* is *Whose Middle East?* Bilgin approaches this question from a critical posture to open the two notions of "region" and "security" to scrutiny. The important insight here is that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between the idea of a region and practices of security.

The competing security referents and regional visions that emerge from this analysis help us think about the problem of regional security from a different perspective than the systemic analysis advanced by most Realist materialist approaches or Barnett's ideational focus on Arabism. Bilgin's work on visions of regional security has grown and shifted from the post-Cold War through to the post-Arab uprisings period. The first regional conceptions she advanced were: the Middle East, the Mediterranean Middle East, the Arab Middle East, and the Muslim Middle East (Bilgin 2015). These competing conceptions juxtaposed regional and international actors' visions of the region. By the mid-2010's, Bilgin had expanded these conceptions to include two new ones: a Turkish "Ottoman geopolitical space" and one she calls "al-Midan" to capture the people-led movements throughout the region to reclaim politics away from authoritarian leaders. Bilgin's arguments that competing notions of *Whose Security?* created the conditions for overlapping conflicts has been important in situating regional conflict at the intersection of material and ideational tensions.

This scholarship was productive in initiating two important shifts in how people wrote and taught about the MENA. The first was to emphasize the interplay between domestic and regional processes, thus extracting the MENA from the peripheral role the region played in most IR scholarship. The second major shift was in bridging together material and ideational analysis in trying to understand how security, insecurity, and threats were understood and acted upon in the region (more on this below). The Montréal school that emerged in the 1990s produced scholarship articulating the interplay between domestic, regional, and international factors around both material and ideational referents. This work gestured towards an understanding of security that accounted for various scalar and security levels. In doing so, this scholarship eschewed dogma and doctrine and instead committed to a "theoretical eclecticism" (Salloukh 2017) that was driven by observations about the world and not prescriptive theories and methods that were pigeonholed into an understanding of the region. Salloukh neatly summarizes the benefits of such eclecticism: "it is far more rewarding to travel between theories than to engage in theoretical sectarianism" (Salloukh 2017, 660). Fred Halliday's (2012) excellent book on the International Relations of the Middle East similarly starts with an appeal for theoretical pluralism in understanding conflict and security in the region.

The project of "theoretical eclecticism" has characterized most productive scholarship from within International Relations on the MENA while pointing us towards unique ways of thinking about how to understand security referents in the region. For example, many ideas about the Arab state and its relationship to domestic and global security have emerged from within the "theoretically eclectic" scholarship. Ideas about "Arab National Security" (Korany, Brynen, and Noble 1993), Regime Security (Gause 2009), and the "Weak State" (Kamrava 2016) come out of such positions of theoretical eclecticism. These concepts are state-centric in so far as they seek to understand how regime and state structures shape security referents. Nevertheless, they are productive framings that de-naturalize military referents of insecurity and turn attention to both material and ideational threats.

This body of scholarship was important in linking regime, state, and (in)security through a unique set of puzzles about security in the region. The "weak states" concept that takes as its starting point the puzzle of the political permeability of the region from outside coexisting with the repressive capacities of the state towards internal populations (Salloukh 2017) is a particularly important one. The puzzle of how states can be externally permeable but inter-

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nally strong and repressive has been important in demonstrating how the material and ideational converge to produce differential security referents and how distinctions between regime and state security are meaningful in the MENA. Gregory Gause's (2009) book on the international relations of Persian Gulf countries succinctly argues that the principal security referent in the region is the regime, each of which articulate threats as emanating from transnational identities. These are but two examples of the ideas that emerge out of a theoretically eclectic approach to International Relations and the MENA. In broad terms, much of this scholarship worked at the intersection of International Relations and Middle East Studies (Tessler, Nachtwey, and Dressel 1999; Valbjørn 2017)

Theoretical eclecticism assumes that the existing theoretical, methodological, and conceptual toolkit of one or the other of International Relations' principal theories is limited in helping us understand security. This body of literature seeks to not only inscribe International Relations with the experiences of MENA states and societies but to call for a more engaged pluralism in how we pose puzzles about global politics. Turning our attention to the region from "within" highlights patterns and processes not captured in Big Power analysis of world politics while at the same time demystifying colonial and racialized forms of knowledge that reduce the region to its primordial identities. The importance of such research for students and scholars of the region is that it provides alternative frameworks from which to speak to the discipline of International Relations. While adopting some core ideas and framings from International Relations theories, plural approaches nevertheless serve to highlight the limitations of the field. Barkawi and Laffey (2006, 330) have argued that "a major reason for this inadequacy is that security studies derives its core categories and assumptions about world politics from a particular understanding of European experience." The "Eurocentric character of security studies" has failed to capture the co-constitution of the West and non-West while misrepresenting the role that the Global South plays in security relations (2006, 330). A lot of this work that focuses on bridging levels of analysis, the interactions of the domestic, regional, and international, and which tethers material and ideational analysis functions, in a broad sense, to inscribe the MENA in global security relations differentially.

The persistence of so-called "traditional" security threats helps explain the traction that International Relations theories and pluralist approaches continue to hold in the study of the region. The Iranian nuclear program and European, Israeli, and American attempts at regulating it, the persistence of civil and regional conflict, regional organizations, the ongoing Western-defined threat of terrorism, international intervention, Israeli occupation, and the perpetual prospects of "regional peace" (the most recent version being the Abraham Accords) serve as anchors for research and teaching programs interested in security in the region. This is especially the case in the context of the Global War on Terror (GWoT), a political project that has restructured global security relations around American security referents and entrenched how International Relations incorporates the MENA region into its body of scholarship as a site of global threat and insecurity.

DE-CENTERING BIG POWER POLITICS

The end of superpower rivalry had heralded in a new era of unfettered American supremacy with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Iraq, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Somalia, and other conflicts in the postcolonial world seemed to confirm arguments that the post-Cold War world would be shaped by American power that would quell any primordial, civil conflicts through military interventions while extending American "soft power" throughout the world, creating markets and liberal subjects who would spread capitalism throughout the world. The early 1990s were one more moment, perhaps even the most shining moment, in the post-war American Century. America was triumphant and had assumed the geopolitical power to remake the world in its image. The outbreak of conflict in the post-Cold War period would no longer be shaped by superpower jockeying and proxy wars but direct American involvement.

Perhaps no other moment in global politics foreshadowed the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape and its attendant epistemologies then did Desert Storm. The disastrous Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) was followed by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent American-led invasion to expel the Iraqi army. An international coalition that included Arab states organized under an American-led umbrella expelled the Iraqi army from Kuwait and inflicted untold damage on Iraqi society and the country's infrastructure. A United Nations-enforced no-fly zone and draconian sanctions regime were implemented soon after the war that would decimate Iraq's economic capacity and inflict a horrific generational tragedy. While this was happening in the early 1990s other civil conflicts erupted and festered. The era of American-led intervention was beginning.

American-led military interventions and state-building projects reflected the new geopolitical landscape of the 1990s and produced new questions about conflicts in relation to the role that the United Nations should play in ending conflict. The era of liberal peace was upon us (Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam 2011). These new ideas about how interveners could reshape societies through liberal peace paralleled policy shifts towards broadening the scope of security. Development aid, for example, was increasingly infused with a security logic that gave rise to a so-called security-development nexus (Amer, Swain, and Öjendal 2012). As a policy problem, the nexus was premised on the idea that global security problems were produced by conditions of underdevelopment. In a riff on modernization theory, the policy approach here was to extend market relations and liberal capitalism throughout the world.

The redefinition of security in the post-Cold War period was the context in which the Human Security approach emerged. A Human Security approach shifts attention to the individual as the referent object of security. The approach is generally understood to have emerged in the con-

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text of the early 1990s humanitarian interventions and United Nations peace missions. In rejecting state-centrism, proponents of Human Security advocated for a shift in security referents from the state to the individual. As an intellectual project, this involved identifying how people experienced vulnerability and insecurity. As a policy problem, the Human Security approach advocated for directing resources away from military spending towards what we can broadly term development spending.

Global security in the 1990s was thus increasingly defined by the perceived security threats posed by underdevelopment, the necessity of military intervention to quell local conflicts, and the politico-bureaucratic process of "state-building" in the aftermath of violent conflict. The reframing of post-Cold War threats around these competing security referents reflected growing American concerns about how to manage global order in a unipolar world. In the MENA, this manifest in the possibilities of regional peace that could be anchored in the European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and renewed American political intervention into the region. The Madrid Peace Process that began in in 1991 and culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accords was followed by Jordanian-Israeli peace a year later. It is not hyperbolic to state that in that moment many people genuinely believed that a "New Middle East" was upon us and that enmity between Arab countries and Israel would give way to peace. Scholarship in this period was thus heavily focused on how the external European and American anchors as fail-safes for any serious civil or regional conflict and how regionalism tied to European and American intervention could create peace.

The dominant agendas for studying conflict and security in the MENA were fundamentally altered after 9/11 and the American administration's declaration of a Global War on Terror (GWoT). The projection of American power throughout the world to combat terrorism articulated new global enemies represented by the archetypal Islamist terrorist, hiding in the shadows of failed, weak, or quasi-sovereign states, festering and preparing for a global jihad in which "our way of life" and "our freedoms" were under direct threat. The American-defined GWoT would shift security referents as well as the causes of threat to radical jihadists and the states that harbored them. Any progress towards a global Human Security agenda was subsumed around the renewed attention of interveners to the security-development nexus.

The calamity of torture, violence, and generational trauma inflicted around the world by the GWoT is difficult to comprehend more than twenty years after it began. An almost immediate invasion of Afghanistan to topple the Taliban was followed by a campaign to position Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government as the main threats to global security. International Relations apostles subsequently fell in line to reframe global security around terrorist threats and the states that harbored them. As the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations took root and (predictable) insurgencies arose, the Bush Administration's changing criteria for why they invaded and why they stayed were reflected in International Relations concerns of the 2000s. No matter the human calamity that these wars induced there were terrorists and "bad guys" that had to be fought "over there". The Iraqi and Afghanistan occupations obscured the projection of American power throughout the world under the guise of the GWoT that gave us black sites, torture regimes, and proliferating violence against civilians throughout Africa and Asia.

The post 9/11 period was extraordinarily consequential on how people studied and taught about conflict and security in the MENA. The immediate post-Cold War period was defined by an increased recognition of plural security referents and a shift towards the individual as an object of security. The implicit implication of this scholarly and policy agenda was to de-militarize security and widen its referents. After 9/11, however, terrorism emerged as the principal threat to global security. In the name of fighting terrorism, American-led interventions, policies, and military projection throughout the world contributed to worsening security for states and societies, especially in the MENA. In the context of the projection of American military power, Critical Security Studies scholarship emerged from relative disciplinary obscurity to provide important insight into how power and hierarchy contributed to shaping global politics.

THE CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES CHALLENGE

Perhaps the one thing that all scholars working in Critical Security Studies can agree on is that there are precisely no methodological or theoretical criteria that define scholarly legibility and count as being "critical" research into security. Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2020, 1) rightly argue that the best way to think about the field is as constituted by an "array of perspectives" with "crisscrossing lines of convergence and divergence over the object, method and implications of being 'critical'." There are thus some challenges in reflecting on the field of Critical Security Studies given the plurality defining research that ultimately lays claim to and counts as critical.

The Copenhagen School's securitization framework is the school of Critical Security Studies that has gained the most traction among scholars working in and on the region. Securitization is broadly understood as the rhetorical process of rendering something as a security problem. Speech acts from state officials produce security problems that are acted upon, and as such, security is understood as a process of social construction whereby some threats and not others require emergency measures that go beyond normal politics (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The relationship between speech act and audience is important in order to comprehend how securitization approaches take into consideration the social process of security construction. The speech act cannot exist outside of an audience that takes the claims seriously and which recognize the references and indexicality of speech acts. Discourse cannot move an issue from the realm of politics to the realm of emergency without a shared, intersubjective understanding of the possibilities of such moves. The audience must accept the speech act as constituting a threat.

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Securitization has become a popular framework through how it tethers identities to questions of conflict and security. The apparent splintering of regional order along Sunni-Shi'a lines after the 2003 Iraqi invasion and occupation gave impetus towards understanding conflicts as they related to sectarian identities. The processes through which sectarian (or ethnic) Others were rendered as security threats that demanded certain political interventions and acts has been explored in research that takes identity as the referent object of security. An important intervention in this regard is Hashemi and Postel's (2017) notion of *sectarianization*, which draws on the securitization thesis to argue that regional elites situate sectarian identities as a security threat. By doing so, elites seek to ensure regime survival by bifurcating the region along sectarian lines and acting upon identity threats. The malleability of sectarian identities, and indeed all threatening identities, ensures that elites can shift from one threat to another. Sectarianization draws on the securitization literature that encourages us to see regional politics as constituted by a series of identities that are differentially securitized or de-securitized by various actors. The referent object of security shifts here to collective identities, raising the very real concern of homogenizing groups and rendering conflict as reducible to the issue of identity. Thinking about securitization as offering insight into the organizing norms and identities to the regional system shifts and reduces our dominant notions of identity to sectarian affiliation.

Securitization has thus primarily been deployed to make sense of how sectarianism shapes conflicts. Darwich and Fakhoury's (2016) article on sectarianism in the Syrian conflict is an exemplary piece exploring how sectarian identities are securitized and turned into threats and sources of conflict. This work takes sectarianism seriously without falling into the trap of reducing everything to it. Simon Mabon (2018, 2019) has also published extensively on issues of securitization and de-securitization within the context of the Sunni-Shi'a divide pertaining to the region. Mabon's work does not fall into the trap of the "Shi'a Crescent" (Barzegar 2008) frameworks that emerged after the Iraq war but instead focus on the speech acts that constitute sectarian identities as threats. Del Sarto's (2021) work situates "securitized sectarianism" within broader regional trends before grounding a discussion in Israel's securitizing trajectory since the early 2000s. While much of this scholarship focuses exclusively on sectarian identities, other research focuses on how ethnic identities are similarly subject to different forms of securitization. Karakoç (2020) asks how processes of securitizing and de-securitizing Kurds by both regional and international actors shapes intra-regional cooperation.

Securitization has provided an important framework for scholars of security in the region. The Copenhagen School, however, is only one of many schools of Critical Security Studies. While these schools share a common commitment to expanding the field of security, they are distinguished from each other in meaningful ways. The Welsh School takes as its starting point a critique of state-centric security and seeks to expand security referents and what constitutes threats to individuals. The Paris School focuses on how bureaucrats and bureaucracies create everyday security practices, such as border and migration controls. Our call through the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) for a "Beirut School" (Abboud et al. 2018) in part sought to move critical approaches out of their European context and show how bodies of knowledge could emerge from within the region. Whereas these European based schools were given these labels after a coherent body of work emerged from specific institutional and publishing nodes, our call for a "Beirut School" sought to establish the ACSS as center of gravity for critical scholarship on security to emerge from within the region, both engaging with and moving beyond existing approaches (more on this below).

The principal unifying theme running through these schools is that what constitutes threats and non-threats are produced through political acts, and as such, are open to contestation. A unifying concern of critical scholarship is thus to problematize, de-naturalize, and demystify security, subjecting security discourse and practice to critical scrutiny. The collective aim of critical scholarship is to highlight hierarchies of power and attendant norms, values, and identities that sustain them in our world today and which produce patterns of exclusion and violence that disproportionately effect the most vulnerable in our societies. The end goal of critical security scholarship is to unmask power and hierarchy in our world, regardless of what methods, traditions, and theories are deployed in arriving there.

Despite the common concern with denaturalizing power and hierarchy, critical security studies scholarship has not been immune from similar criticisms as Security Studies concerning the inclusion of MENA scholarship (Abboud et al. 2018). The problem of disciplinary visibility, let alone legibility, has long shaped inquiry into non-Western perspectives into International Relations more broadly, and Security Studies specifically. The problem of the region's marginalization from the field is best understood as a form of disciplinary unconscious that renders the work of researchers working in/on the Arab region as invisible to the field. There is no imaginary community of scholars "out there" whose work resonates and speaks to the field of Critical Security Studies and which simply need to be discovered. Instead, knowledge about security and insecurity is being produced every day, disseminated, debated, and discussed, but it is done so in ways that are illegible to the field as it stands.

My understanding of this problem is motivated by the excellent work on Arab Marxism by Fadi Bardawil (2020) who rejects the practice of "searching" for something that metropolitan scholarship and scholars have not found. Bardawil reverses the gaze and accuses the metropole of a "metropolitan unconscious", an absence in the metropole's theoretical and institutional architectures of instruments and procedures capable of producing knowledge about the non-West. In reviving our understanding of critical theoretical traditions in the Arab World based on the transversal knowledge of Marxists, whose activism, translations, and writings defied the logics of professionalism, expertise, and disciplinarity, Bardawil shows us a way forward for localiz-

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ing our understandings of security and insecurity. To do so, we need to reject legibility criteria and try to understand how scholars, movements, and artists are producing their own ways of thinking about security and insecurity.

The "disciplinary unconscious" I am interested in is created through the exclusion of scholarly knowledge production from within the region that is often illegible to the field. Existing theory and pluralism are important in yielding understandings of security in the region. In the context of competing and overlapping crises I am more interested in the question of: *Where can we access knowledge that helps us understand the complexities of crisis and insecurity in the present day*?

This is a question that scholars of security should be asking themselves. In the same way that Western Marxists ignored or could not engage with the Arab Marxists whose lives shape Bardawil's analysis, I believe that the field of Critical Security Studies has failed to engage with knowledge produced in the region because scholars have sought out those who replicate or mimic the field, rather than those who traverse it. What many metropolitan scholars count as Critical Security Studies will not be found in the region, where scholars, activists, artists, and others have developed alternative languages, vocabularies, frameworks, and empirical and archival sites from which to develop knowledge about security and insecurity.

The sociological, institutional, and epistemological inclusion of the Arab region, and the non-West in general, into the field of (Critical) Security Studies requires an openness to what is unconscious in the discipline and not that which is reflectively "out there". Recovering the unconscious, in the way that Bardawil does, is to commit to engagement with radically different writers from around the world who make sense of it differently. This unconscious is reproductive of the hierarchies of knowledge production and network building that concentrate publications in Western journals and institutions. I am not simply referring to an absence but a willful peripheralization of alternative modes of thought and analysis that provide knowledge about the world. We simply cannot expect alternative approaches to proliferate when Western institutions, journals, and networks are hierarchically positioned in relation to the non-West, and can implicitly dictate what counts as scholarship, knowledge, and theory. It is not the case that people around the world are not producing knowledge about security, but that the fields we associate with, and the principal schools, journals, academic programs, and institutions that produce knowledge about security in the Arab World, are not sufficiently engaged with how people there are making sense of the world.

Scholars, activists, artists, and others from within the region continue to produce knowledge about their lived experiences that are often invisible to scholars (admittedly, like myself) who are based in metropolitan institutions. This knowledge shifts the lens of Critical Security Studies *away* from discourse, power, institutions, and technologies decidedly *towards* the ontological and affective consequences of security practices and how people experience these differentially. If Critical Security Studies helps us inquire into how policy gets framed and acted upon in security terms, and how these actions shape social and political relations, then the work of others from within the region are exploring the experience rather than the construction of that process. In other words, there are bodies of knowledge that shift our gaze away from how security is constructed to how it is experienced. This, I would argue, is the major challenge facing security scholarship today, both to engage with alternative forms of knowledge production and to tether this work to existing scholarly approaches with the aim of better localizing our understanding of the conditions of (in)security.

A Critical Security Studies that localizes insecurity is grounded in the plural experiences and knowledges emanating from overlapping crises and insecurity. Such an approach embraces the plurality and openness inherent in the field. How do people appropriate state security practices, make sense of them, and resist them when the risk of violence and death is very real? In Morocco, for example, activists, protestors, and artists adopted the language of *Hogra* (a term used to refer to state abuse and injustice) as a rallying cry to mobilize protests after the brutal murder of fish vendor Mouhcine Fikri by police in his town of al Hoceima. Similarly, in Tunisia, activists and protestors began a campaign around the phrase *ta'alum oum* ("learn to swim") after police officers forced a 19-year-old named Omar Laabidi to jump in the water even after he told them he did not swim. Laabidi drowned. In Lebanon, protests that began in October 2019 against political elites adopted the slogan Kuloun ya'ni kuloun ("all means all") to refer to their desire to overthrow the entire system. These movements all produce knowledge about security in the MENA.

The aforesaid movements and practices represent different understandings of security referents and subjects in the MENA region. Critical Security Studies helps us unmask power and supports us in making sense of these movements in relation to power and hierarchy. What are the subjectivities we are interested in as researchers of conflict and security in the region? What are the forms of subjectivity that emerge in authoritarian contexts? The conditions under which subjectivity emerge in the Arab region differ radically from the archetypal liberal subject that is at the core of the experience of security practices in the West. Lamia Moghnieh's (2017) provocation about how researchers live-in-violence internalizes the question of subjectivity. Moghnieh's departure point is a critique of how violence is theorized as an event or encounter and not something that is lived in the everyday. Her research demonstrates an incompatibility between policy and disciplinary knowledge about violence, on the one hand, and how people live-in-violence differentially, on the other. What I draw on from Moghnieh is an importance for a theorization of the everyday, specifically an understanding of the relational pressures that produce sustained, structural forms of insecurity in the lives of people throughout the region. The subjectivities I am interested in are those emanating from individuals that live insecurity in the everyday, not as a moment or event, such as passing through the airport, but as something ubiquitous and all-encompassing. My interest in a subjectivity

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produced through living-in-insecurity is a move towards deeper understanding of conflict and its legacies. Research needs to account for the multiplicity of knowledge practices, strategies, and forms of cultural production that people use to contain and make sense of violence and insecurity as a continuous experience.

It may be a useful exercise to flip the script and ask what Critical Security Studies tells people experiencing insecurity in the region. If the field of Security Studies has little to say about the current conditions of crisis and insecurity in Lebanon, then what is the critical response to this disciplinary unconscious? Does Critical Security Studies have the tools to capture the overlapping and compounding crises in Lebanon, or those experienced by displaced Syrians? Or can Critical Security Studies only offer the displaced a critique of the global norms that sustain the surveillance and disciplining practices of international organizations? I do not ask these questions as criticisms but as sympathetic provocations to think about methods to expand what it means to engage in criticality in the face of such immense human suffering and insecurity.

This means trying to understand the production of security practice but also how insecurity is produced, lived, and navigated. Following Moghnieh, we should retain interest in how researchers live-in-violence, and in how people within the region live-in-insecurity, or as Hermez and Dardiry (2020) call living-in-crisis. Waleed Hazbun (2017) states that "across the Arab World, societal actors often understand the sources of insecurity they face in ways that differ from those of Arab state elites and political regimes." How can this posture shape our teaching and research?

An excellent forum in *International Studies Perspectives* (Darwich et al. 2021) provides important insight into what explorations of criticality, insecurity, and IR more broadly look like from within the Arab classroom, a political space that is remarkably underexplored in our understandings of what it means to teach and write about security. The forum poses a series of important questions about teaching, one of the most important being how IR *travels* to the Arab classroom. If the same material is taught across American, European, and Arab classrooms, is it received the same way by students? The obvious answer is that it is not, because pedagogy, knowledge production, students' own experiences, and classroom dynamics, come together to shape how IR is understood and debated. While IR may remain an "American social science", how it travels to the region and diffuses throughout the Arab classroom means that theories do not travel intact, but, "instead, they are adapted, challenged, critiqued, and/or replaced by alternative homegrown perspectives in the very different Arab classrooms." (8).

The Arab classroom provides an interesting space to consider what it means for IR theory to travel elsewhere and how ideas are engaged, debated, appropriated, and discarded in contexts in which global power is experienced differently. The Forum shows divergent approaches to doing IR differently in the classroom, from grounding students in core IR theories as a departure point for localizing theories (Salloukh), to engaging directly with postcolonial and critical approaches within IR (Hazbun), and to asking how Islamists conceptualize international relations (Abou Samra).

Institutional challenges in producing IR knowledge from within public universities in Morocco, for example, show how "… the impediments to theoretical research in IR are not political or cultural, but rather have more to do with methodological, technical, and historical legacies" (Saddiki 2020, 17). In a similar vein, Saouli's contribution shows how different, and potentially limiting, teaching IR in Arabic can be in contexts where available material is scarce. The classroom provides remarkably productive insight into some of the disciplinary challenges and limitations explored up until this point in the essay. How professors navigate linguistic, institutional, cultural, and power relationships to teach IR outside of the Euro-American spaces where much scholarship has been produced tells us a great deal about how theory travels and what it may mean to engage in a truly global IR.

TOWARDS A NON-WESTERN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS?

A corollary to the growth of CSS scholarship has been increasing calls for non-western or decolonial scholarship that inquires into "'others' conceptions of the international" (Bilgin 2015). These calls fit nicely within the Critical Security Studies debates about how to de-center the state as the principal security referent and unit of analysis while also de-universalizing the European experience as the epistemological and empirical basis of inquiry into the international. I see this work as being inspired by two main goals. The first is to produce new subjects of (in)security outside of liberal democratic politics. The archetypal liberal subject is often taken as the subjectivity that is targeted by securitizing practices. The second is to introduce new vocabularies, ideas, theories, and empirics into the study of the international. This part of the project seeks to create new ways of thinking and writing about the world that are inspired by other, principally non-European approaches.

The shift towards a "non-western" or more "globalizing" International Relations represents a beneficial trend in knowledge production that takes seriously much of the criticisms levelled at the field. Bilgin and Çapan succinctly capture what this shift does and what does not do: "The method that we proffer is *not* one of 'adding (the locals) and stirring', *but* rethinking disciplinary IR's epistemological and ontological underpinnings. The former corresponds to a reluctant pursuit of plurality and leaves disciplinary IR untouched. The latter embraces pluralism…" [emphasis in original] (2021, 1). The approach of "adding locals in" captures so much of what is deeply problematic (and perhaps even opportunistic) about calls for a non-Western IR. Acharya and Buzan's (2007) contemplative "why is there no non-Western IR theory" takes the West as the referential for theory and knowledge production. Bilgin (2015) has critiqued this question by pointing out that the problem is not that others do not have theory but that we only look at the world through a particular (Western) theory, mainly, International Relations. I share with Bilgin a concern that the

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shift to non-Western International Relations is premised on a faulty assumption that "others" do not have theory, let alone International Relations theory. Reducing the problem to one of absence ignores the multiple forms of epistemological presence that exists in the world to make sense of the international.

Despite these criticisms of the disciplinary motivations behind inquiring into others' conception of the international, the shifts towards non-Western International Relations are quite important and point us to more complex ways of understanding conflict and security. These shifts are important in that they try and render people, places, and patterns that exist mostly on the margins of traditional International Relations theory and Security Studies more visible by highlighting and juxtaposing different conceptions of security and insecurity. This scholarship holds the promise of producing very different answers to the question of *Whose Security?*

In this way, the move towards a non-Western International Relations can tell us a lot about how security referents emerge in different contexts. Book Series' such as *Worlding Beyond the West*, *Critical Security Studies in the Global South,* and *IR Theory and Practice in Asia* are examples of publishing networks that seek to shift how the non-West is incorporated into the study of the international. These book series and other momentum towards non-Western International Relations have been important in critiquing Western-centrism and advancing alternative ways of conceptualizing the international. There is no doubt that a "non-Western International Relations" has taken on important space in the epistemological landscape of security studies. An interesting pedagogical project may be to locate the intersections of Critical Security Studies and non-Western International Relations. Where is there convergence and divergence between these approaches to understanding the international? And how do these intersections serve to expand our answers to the question of *Whose Security?* The "theoretically eclectic" International Relations scholarship described earlier was trying to work at the intersection of International Relations and Middle East Studies. Perhaps a similar shift in how we write and teach about security that brings insights from what CSS and non-Western International Relations contributions tell us can similarly produce interesting, insightful analysis into the problem of security today.

WHOSE SECURITY?

How we write and teach about security depends on how we answer the question *Whose Security?* The scholarship reviewed in the first part of this essay was driven by a response to this question that foregrounded Western state interests. Critiques emerged in the post-Cold War period that took the individual as the referent object of security while critical schools emerged to interrogate how existing security scholarship reproduced power and hierarchy in the world. Both developments opened the question of *Whose Security?* to radically new referents while providing the basis for a sustained critique of the relationship between power, policy, and IR scholarship. Critical Security Studies has opened the possibility for re-imagining security around different referents. More specifically, in engaging in a critique of power, CSS shines light on how the marginalized and peripheral are targeted by security practices.

The intellectual project of demystifying and deconstructing the state as the referent object of security needs to remain a core part of any critical scholarship on security. The racist and civilizational worldviews informing much of the Cold War and post-Cold War era literature on conflict and security in the Middle East have persisted well into the 21st century. In 2022, Josep Borell, the European Union's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, effectively the regional organization's chief foreign policy official, said the following:

> Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humankind has been able to build … The rest of the world is not exactly a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden.

The language of "us" and "them" manifests in a bifurcated politics that acts on "them" as security threats. The articulation of threats from the "jungle" remains an important motif in security thinking today where problems "over there" require militarized responses to protect the "garden". The GWoT, international terrorism, migration and border controls, and a host of other threats give momentum towards continued imperial analysis of conflict and security that posit insecurity's effects as problems that the West needs to control and contain. The bifurcating and violent projects that Borell's words represent need to be provincialized and abnormalized and understood for what they are, as projects of colonial projection that seek to universalize specific states' interests as global interests and to orient global politics accordingly.

One of the promises of critical approaches to security is to reject these dichotomies and to understand global security as co-constituted (Barkawi and Laffey 2006). In my reflection, I have tried to draw on some important scholarship that points a direction out of reproducing these dichotomies. I have also tried to reflect on the limitations of this scholarship. More than anything, however, I have tried to show that how we think about whose security matters shapes our scholarship and teaching. I have used major approaches to studying security in the MENA as inflection points in this reflection to briefly describe their core tenets while gesturing towards ways that they do and do not incorporate the region into different bodies of scholarship. My references here are by no means exhaustive but indicative of what I see as trends within this scholarship. Having started with the traditional Security Studies approaches and moving through critical responses, I have shown how different scholarly traditions approach the question of *Whose Security?* and what is at stake in each approach. More than anything, I hope that this reflection has supported Gani and Marshall's call for "courage and creativity in how we cultivate knowledge, in questioning the purpose and the

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ends of that knowledge, and to be discerning in how we try to put it into practice." (2022, 22).

COMPETING INTERESTS

I state that no competing interests exist.

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