

**Workshop Summary:**  
**“Topologies of security:**  
**Critical security studies in postcolonial and postsocialist scenes”**

On Monday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 an interdisciplinary workshop was held under the above title within the framework of the subproject C05 “Political Security and Economized Infrastructures” of the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio 138 “Dynamics of Security”. In its endeavour to interrelate conversations in post-colonial, post-socialist and critical security studies, the event brought together researchers from a wide range of disciplinary and intellectual backgrounds, including critical geography, (cyber) security, socio-technological, religious, cultural and area studies. A guiding consideration was that postcoloniality and postsocialism both articulate, if not always converging, standpoints from which to critically address a western/northern/modern normativity of societal standards and practices, some of which are related to conceptions of security. The contributors’ presentations and in-depth discussions provided valuable insights into trajectories and forms of insecurity experienced in spaces across post-socialist Eurasia, Africa and the Middle East while also documenting the attempts of social movements and activist struggles to challenge state-centric and violent conceptions of security. The event, and notably the dual keynote on ‘Non-Western perspectives in security studies’ by Alexandra Gheciu and Samer Abboud, offered important inputs and reflections for the research of the Collaborative Research Centre/Transregio 138. Among these, the perhaps most important one is the challenge posed to critical security studies – including research conducted from historical or historicizing angles – by critical accounts of the silences and exclusions that social scientific accounts tend to produce and that various critical endeavours across disciplines seek to problematize and overcome.

The event was opened by Andreas Langenohl who welcomed participants and introduced the work of the Collaborative Research Centre and the rationale of structuring the conversation around the idea of ‘topologies of security’. While the organizing team, which also included Philipp Lottholz (Postdoctoral Fellow in the same subproject) and Andrew Dwyer (former CRC Visiting Fellow and currently based at the University of Bristol) had contributed a concept paper on “Topologies and scenes of security”, participants were given a free hand in referring to the latter and situating their work with the broad interests of the workshop.

The first panel featured two contributions under the broader theme of how technologies of control and security circulate across space, on the one hand, and the personal experiences they produce, on the other. Alessandra Russo (University of Trento) started by presenting her work on the EU’s externalisation of security governance in the areas of border security and security sector reform in the European neighbourhood, which pays particular attention to the role of non-state actors such as private security companies and a large number of consultants who benefit from the large-scale financial disbursements of EU security project funding. Mina Ibrahim’s (CRC Visiting Fellow) presentation gave insight into the lives of current or ex-

prisoners from among Coptic Christians in Egypt, one of the heavily militarized states propped up by EU and other Western support. As Ibrahim demonstrated on the basis of his PhD research, Egypt's religion-based framework of citizenship rights renders the personal safety and general living situation of (ex-)prisoners precarious, as multiple aspects of life are mediated by the Coptic church (e.g. issuing of certificates necessary to enter a marriage) and its local parishes, which are often primary sources of social belonging but also impose moral codes that can be constraining especially for non-conformist people.

Extending this initial perspective on the expansion and effects of state security apparatuses, Panel 2 assembled two contributions on attempts to challenge and overturn violence and misconduct of state institutions. Under the title "‘The state killed my son’: Spacetaking politics and affective entanglements in the European periphery", Danijela Majstorović (Humboldt Experienced Fellow at the Justus Liebig University Giessen) presented her work on the 'Justice for David' movement. Majstorović not only analysed the protests and wider affective landscape that had emerged after the killing of a student in the Bosnian town of Banja Luka, but also got involved herself to provide the struggle of David's father Davor against the authorities, who deny any accountability to this day. Amber Murrey's presentation on the Anglophone (or Ambazonia) struggle in the southwest and northwest regions of Cameroon presented a further gradation of state violence, as Cameroonian state authorities tried to silence protests since 2016 through sustained and periodic internet blackouts in conjunction with direct use of force, including the highly publicised detentions of renown activists and artists in its attempts to quell what they called 'cyber terrorism'. The Q&A on the two papers revolved around the dynamics between digital and street protests and some of the impasses faced by these movements, as conventional party politics in both countries have been weakened by intentionally ethnicized institutional architectures and propagandist spectacles, while the attention of international audiences and potential partners has been relatively selective and intermittent.

After a break, the event continued with two parallel panels which after a brief Q&A merged into a plenary to exchange key take-aways and extrapolate these in a general discussion. Panel 3 explored 'Socio-technological and medical' aspects in the critical studies of (in-)security and was initiated by Andrew Dwyer's (University of Bristol) intervention, which, applying Gayatri Spivak's famous question in the area of computing ('Can the computer speak?') to argue that computation has always been a participant in the production and negotiation of (in)security through its capacity to partake in language production. Extending this critical perspective on the role of technology and particularly algorithms and forms of 'artificial intelligence' in processes of an inherently social nature, Professor Jutta Weber's (University of Paderborn) presentation tackled the role of Social Network Analysis in contemporary warfare. Her argument that algorithms and associated technical solutions clearly require transparent and publicly accountable application mechanisms was substantiated by the fact that non-technological solutions such as the US Army's Human Terrain Program which drew on and

systematized anthropological knowledge on Afghan society had equally detrimental effects as its algorithm-based successors. Situated in the field of global health governance, Karolina Kluczevska's (Visiting Fellow at the CRC) contribution, based on her research with Oleg Korneev, provided a useful comparison and a conclusion affirming the panel's underlying agreement: The policies and practices of preventing HIV/AIDS in Tajikistan from the 1980s through today had similar detrimental effects on the safety situations, living conditions and basic human rights of individuals identified as "ill", while at the same time serving the collective interest to limit the spread of the disease. Similar to the applications of technology discussed in the other papers, these tools require scrutiny, as they impact on people's intimate perceptions and experiences of (in-)security.

Meanwhile, Panel 4 revolved around the role of technologies and the various actors related to them in producing (in-)security in urban spaces across the globe. Gideon van Riet's (North-West University, South Africa) critical account of the ambiguous but at times symbiotic relation between the police and private policing groups in the JB Marks Municipality southwest of Johannesburg was extrapolated in a global perspective by Philipp Lottholz's (Postdoctoral Fellow at the CRC) presentation of a paper on "Safe City" projects. These, as his and his colleague Amina Nolte's research show, have emerged as part of the attempts of Israeli security companies to export solutions for the prevention of crime, violence and terror that integrate technologies and chains of commands with on-the-ground security practices. Tracing these projects from their emergence to recent applications in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the research intends to show how security is in these cases, as in van Riet's analysis, narrowly defined by the interest of leading or dominant groups while excluding the concerns of wider populations that need to reclaim such efforts or set up their own initiatives. Balihar Sanghera (University of Kent) presented his and Elmira Satybaldieva's (ibid.) work on the political economy of rentiership and 'improperty' (i.e. property obtained not for use but for capital accumulation) in Kyrgyzstan. While not explicitly referring to security studies, Sanghera's contribution shed crucial light on the wider ramifications of security practices in the global periphery, where the close entwinement of politics and local-policymaking with business (e.g. in the person of almost a third of the Bishkek City Counsellors being construction company owners) present a bleak and unacceptable picture of injustice, precarity, but also forms of insecurity, of the majority population. Satybaldieva's research on women's movements against predatory money lenders and for more regulation of the lending and banking sector presented an entry point for challenging and potentially transforming this situation. The exchange of the two panels' insights in the following plenary revolved largely, though not only, around the possible implications of the examined situations for the way in which both critical security studies and social research generally situate themselves in epistemological and (moral) philosophical debates.

The final part of the event was a dual keynote moderated by Regina Kreide (CRC "Dynamics of Security") and attended by both the workshop participants and colleagues from the

Collaborative Research Centre. The first intervention by Alexandra Gheciu, Professor at the University of Ottawa, drew the audience's attention to scenes of insecurity evolving in Eastern Europe where illiberal regimes are increasingly gaining clout by denouncing the 'Western democratic project' and claiming traditional, nationalist and nativist values as the true essence and policy principles of their societies. She illustrated this trajectory and its deepening, captured in the contribution title 'Changing scenes of security in the time of Corona', with new legislation and policy measures taken for instance by the Hungarian government in the absence of public outcry during the state of emergency, by which women's access to abortion services is further criminalized and the living conditions and citizen rights of Roma and other ethnic minorities further diminished.

Samer Abboud, Associate Professor at Villanova University and based his contribution on his experiences in co-founding and establishing the Beirut Forum of Security Studies which seeks to give a platform for knowledge on (in-)security in the Middle East that has so far either been silenced and ignored in the Western 'canon' or is simply not spectacular enough to receive more attention. This approach presents a critical extension of the postsocialist-postcolonial dialogue that the workshop organisers proposed to merge with critical security studies perspectives: Embracing a decolonial pedagogy, the Beirut Form seeks to build new theoretical concepts and to challenge categories of analysis on the basis of accounts from communities across the Middle East, a term to be challenged in itself from this perspective. Nevertheless, Abboud also indicated that opinions of the Forum members diverge and thus present the full range from the above-mentioned ambition to produce security knowledge alternative to the academic canon, and ones that still seek visibility and recognition within this canon. Among other things, the discussion during the Q&A further revolved around the latter 'dual approach' of producing critical accounts and theories of security both from within the established system of academic knowledge production and beyond it, wherein the aspect of knowledge documented in oral traditions as well as in literary work was agreed to be of key importance. Both the dual keynote and the workshop as a whole thus contributed important insights and new directions for the advancing of a critical inquiry of historical and historicized understandings of security and their embedding in processes of social hierarchy, (geo-) political dominance and other exigencies of modern social organization.