'Theorizing is a practice as well as undertaking research'
Frank Gadinger sees International Practice Theory still flourishing and critically evaluates the starting promises of this turn towards empirical work driven by new methods.

'International Relations has privileged practices of ‘saying’
Ingvild Bode is interested in how non-verbal practices shape norms and critically assesses an emerging, silent norm of ‘meaningful’ human control in the field of AI weapon systems.

'It would be impossible to do this work over zoom'
A talk with Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams about the Global Right, about field work and an uneasy nexus between security and development.

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Lesch / Loh on China’s strategic practice and field overlaps in BRI project relations, p. 19
Christine Unrau remembers Elena Pulcini, p. 30
Dear Readers,

The pandemic has transformed many of our academic practices – from the way in which we conduct interviews, hold meetings and colloquia, convene annual meetings, to how we teach and supervise students. Everyday life practices of millions of people worldwide have also undergone rapid changes through social distancing and home working for those who can afford to do so, but also for those who have been disadvantaged and exposed to additional risk. Not to speak of the security threads arising from the pandemic that have led to new practices of surveillance and policing but also of mobilizing and orchestrating in global policy.

Thus, it seems a good moment to review developments in practice theory and its contribution to research on global cooperation. In February 2021, the Centre co-organized an International Conference on ‘New Voices of International Practice Research’. Research group leader Frank Gadinger takes the remarkably high level of interest in this event as a starting point for his reflections on why practice theory has proven to be more than a fashion in international relations research. An intriguing set of complementary contributions focuses on the use of practice theory in critical security studies (Bode), peacekeeping (Laurence), policing (Pingeot), prevention (Bergués and Schmidt) and China’s strategic practices in the Belt and Road initiative (Lesch and Loh).

As further highlights, this issue includes an interview with fellows Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams on the attack of the transnationally networked extreme right on the liberal world order; and an introduction to Postdoc Research Fellow Alena Drieschova’s project ‘Representants and International Orders’.

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of our Alumni Fellow Professor Elena Pulcini. Christine Unrau commemorates her.

We wish you a good read!

Sigrid Quack
Managing Director

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International Practice Theory is still flourishing. During the second lockdown in grey November 2020, my colleague Christian Bueger and I had the idea to organize the online event ‘New Voices in International Practice Research’ as an attempt to bring together practice-oriented scholars who, like us, were missing the personal exchange over research ideas at conferences. Back then, we did not anticipate the enthusiastic participation of over 100 scholars, who would proceed to spend two days passionately discussing their arguments about new directions of the practice turn. Of course, such overwhelming moments might result from the boring times at home (as a positive side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic), but we would interpret it as a broader positive trend on how the practice turn has developed. Two decades ago, when Iver Neumann (2002) made a first strong claim for studying practices and even ten years later when Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (2011) published the game-changing edited volume International Practices, it was not clear that Davide Nicolini (2013), as a pioneer of practice research in organization studies, would discuss his understanding of theory with International Relations (IR) scholars on common grounds. Nor was it apparent that conceptual refinements of Bourdieusian field theory, discussions on the positionality of researchers, and possibilities of criticizing practices, or practical questions around methods and writing about practices would be the norm in today’s scholarly practice.

Such a productive development is remarkable, but we know from examples of earlier turns (constructivism) as well as from insights by historians and sociologists of science, like Thomas Kuhn, that promising concepts and programmes disappear and that academic disciplines have limited attention spans and are subject to what Randall Collins calls ‘the law of small numbers’ (1988). As I argue in the joint publication with Christian (Bueger and Gadinger 2018), academic disciplines are subject to trends, fashion, and fads as new perspectives, turns, and theorists come and go. At some point in time, the discussions (some critics call it a hype) surrounding the practice turn, practice theory, and the concept of practice may fade away. Another related option for International Practice Theory is mainstreaming. In a positive reading, the decreasing attractiveness of practice as a concept results from the integration of its core insights into general academic knowledge. Scholars would no longer speak about practice all the time, but they would use it rather naturally while doing research. A disappearance, therefore, is not necessarily tantamount to a failure of the practice turn. The pessimistic reading, however, is that practice theory is a mere fad, a short hype, nothing more. The opposite of disappearance or mainstreaming is paradigmatization.

As some external observers of our online event might argue, the group of practice-oriented scholars have still established a common language by using, for instance, some seminal authors as reference points. The fact that this event emerged from the institutionalization as a standing section (‘International Practices’) in the context of the European International Studies Association (EISA) signals that doing practice theory has become part of a professionalization process. Historian of science Ilana Löwy (1992) described such a development of scholars establishing a common identity...
around shared premises and concepts as a shift from a more loosely organized ‘trading zone’, to a more stabilized ‘pidgin zone’, to a more fully institutionalized ‘creole zone’. Landing in the creole zone would signify the establishment of International Practice Theory as a new paradigm in the IR discipline, comprised of an established in-group and a periphery, agreed definitions and tools, a common ‘thought-style’ (Ludwik Fleck 1980), and a set of clearly laid out questions to be addressed. Practice theory would then become stylized in handbook chapters and be discussed in IR textbooks as a paradigm alongside realism and constructivism. Someone may then state, with the same conviction that some would have today in claiming to be a realist: ‘I am a practice theorist’. Such a scenario would imply that scholars increasingly agree on core concepts and their definitions.

The major advantage of understanding practice research as a trading zone

Although practice theory can be found in some handbooks and textbooks, and there are also some seminal authors and publications such as Adler and Pouliot’s work, or our overview work on key approaches, main conceptual challenges, and promising research techniques (Bueger and Gadinger 2018), it is rather daring to regard practice theory as a new paradigm. As Ted Hopf (2021) observed in a recent reflection on the practice turn, Adler and Pouliot’s work is the most quoted but also the most criticized one due to their paradigmatic claims, which many scholars seem to dislike (see, e.g., Joseph and Kurki 2018). In comparison, Hopf (2021: forthcoming) described our approach as the one in the current debate which ‘let[s] thousand flowers bloom’. We do not disagree with his metaphorical description, as it nicely fits to our notion of understanding the conversation around the concept of practice as a ‘trading zone’ in the tradition of Peter Galison. Galison (1997) introduced the notion of scrutinizing how scientists can cooperate and exchange results and concepts, while simultaneously disagreeing on their general or global meanings. We argue that the turn to International Practice Theory can be understood as such an intellectual trading zone. Scholars are bound together by their shared understanding of the value of studying ‘practice’. In this space, different scholars meet and trade ideas of how to conduct intelligible IR research relying on concepts of practice. Whilst engaging in this exchange, practice-oriented scholars may still continue to fundamentally disagree over the meaning of core concepts.

We are aware that such an understanding may be criticized as loose and incoherent, but we would argue that the notion of the trading zone, where thousand flowers are allowed to bloom, ‘from Bourdieu to Dewey, from Foucault to Latour, from Wenger to Reckwitz, from Boltanski to Schatzki, and many others’ (Hopf 2021: forthcoming), is an expression of intellectual strength, not weakness. Rather than directing efforts towards agreement, the exchanges and tensions need to be preserved. A recent example for the productivity of such tensions can be found in Catriona Standfield’s intervention (2020) to consider a feminist perspective in exploring diplomatic practices. Other instances include Sebastian Schindler and Tobias Wille’s (2019) claim that the dispute between practice-oriented scholars over the role of critique results from different epistemic premises and political concerns, or the philosophical intervention by Silviya Lechner and Mervyn Frost (2018), among others, which argues that Wittgenstein’s notion of practice as language-games needs more consideration to address the underlying normativity of practice. These examples demonstrate that a narrow agreement on one distinct approach, as Bourdieu’s praxeology seemed to be in the pioneer period, would hinder the exploration of new empirical results, conceptual refinements and methodological reflections. However, such a notion of trading ideas does not mean that everybody can or should be a practice theorist, as some scholars earlier claimed in a form of over-optimism. As argued earlier (Bueger and Gadinger 2015), doing practice research needs some core commitments, such as the rejection of substantivist notions of agency and structure in terms of methodological individualism or collectivism, the consideration of materiality, the notion of social order in terms of multiplicity, the performativity of the world, or the primacy of the empirical. Not everybody would subscribe to these commitments, particularly to start any kind of research with practices, and not with actors and their interests as many IR scholars still prefer. But even a rather inconspicuous claim such as the primacy of the empirical has broader implications than some scholars are able to accept.

Practice theory as a methodological orientation for praxiographic research

As Davide Nicolini emphasized in his keynote speech, such an understanding of doing practice-oriented research implies a different notion of theory. Practice theory then refers to ‘new ways of seeing and interpreting the world’. In their most sophisticated version, practice theories provide ‘resources for making new things thinkable and communicable’ (Nicolini 2021). Nicolini also used Bruno Latour’s term ‘infra-language’, which means that doing practice research is an ongoing process between empirical work and conceptual refinement and does not follow a form of meta-language in fixed assumptions. In live-
ly chat discussions with participants during the conference, Nicolini later argued to understand practice theory as a methodological orientation, which comes close to our own understanding of regarding International Practice Theory as an empirical project rather than a theoretical one. What we need, however, are ‘sensitizing concepts’ (as Herbert Blumer termed it), to know how to start with research and to have some guidance for seeing what is relevant. Concepts such as field (Pierre Bourdieu), dispute (Luc Boltanski), or community (Etienne Wenger) have no direct empirical reference, yet they provide promising heuristic devices for empirical research. Understood in this sense, practice theory provides a methodological orientation for praxiographic research.

In our joint book, we advance the notion of praxiography as the set of methods and techniques corresponding to practice theory’s needs. The term praxiography (originally coined by Annemarie Mol) implies that the study of practices has much in common with ethnography (and other related procedures in interpretive social science). The common concern is to record, to describe, and to reconstruct (graphy); however, the interest lies not in culture (ethno) but practice (praxis). Doing praxiography therefore implies to recognize that theorizing is a practice as well as undertaking research. The major aim of talking and reflecting about praxiography is not to throw another term into the debate but to push the rather hesitant discussion on how to study international practices and how to write about it in books and journal articles. It seems to us that these questions are still sidelined and not at the heart of recent debates. If, as we hope, International Practice Theory should develop as a productive trading zone, it might be one of the keys to focus more on research strategies, methods, and techniques, as well as to reflect more on ethical issues such as the positionality of the researcher. These debates are not completely new, as feminist and postcolonial scholars remind us and have demonstrated in their work from the beginning.

**Future directions of the practice turn?**

If we reflect in the concluding section on how the practice turn will develop and which directions are the most promising ones, it makes sense to evaluate the starting promises. From the beginning, International Practice Theory came with several promises: getting closer to the actions, routines, and lifeworlds of practitioners who practice IR, producing knowledge that is of relevance beyond the immediate group of peers, avoiding intellectual dualisms such as agency and structure, developing a perspective that is receptive to change, and the reproduction, or more fully inte-
grating material aspects, ranging from bodily movements to objects and artefacts.

As it can be seen today, International Practice Theory has performed well on some of these promises but less so on others. The presentations and discussions at the event underline earlier observations that practice research is particularly strong in showing the material side of doing world politics and overcoming existing dualisms by starting with practices as core units of analysis. Whether practice theory is able to deal simultaneously with order and change remains one of the key challenges and has been controversially discussed in recent debates. The first promise on the proximity to practice presents, however, a mixed record. There is a turn towards empirical work driven by new methods, such as field work. In the study of diplomacy, researchers now seek to speak with diplomats and participate in their meetings, while in Security Studies researchers shadow security experts or spend time at airports and military headquarters (see, e.g., Schmitt (2017)). We know more about some phenomena such as the inner workings of the European Union, diplomatic practices, and the rituals of the United Nations Security Council. The narratives become richer and thicker. Yet, some fields of research are still underexplored such as everyday life in international organizations.

We assume that International Practice Theory will not disappear from the stage as long as practice-oriented scholars present novel empirical results by using innovative methods and thereby demonstrate the value added by a turn to practices. The empirical results presented by some ‘new voices’ at the conference, for instance, on the postcolonial field of policing practices (Lou Pingeot), practice change in UN peacekeeping (Marion Laurence), and the emergence of new expert practices in international organizations (Aurel Niederberger) demonstrate that the trading zone works well and that the primacy of empirical research nevertheless allows to reflect on concepts and research methodologies.

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Nicolini, Davide (2021). There is Nothing as Practical as a Good Theory (of Practice). Or is There? Revisiting the Relationship Between Practice and (Academic) Theory from a Praxeological Perspective’ Keynote Lecture at the conference New Voices in International Practice Research.


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Starting point prompts me to make two observations. First, there are many earlier contributions to IR that speak to practices and share similar aims but do not use the language of practice theories. These include groundbreaking contributions by feminist scholars and critical security scholars. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe, as exemplified in her famous work *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Enloe 2014), endeavours to make the actions of diverse women visible and thereby expose the actual working of international politics. Much like focusing on practices, scholars like Enloe focus on the everyday realities of these women, thereby broadening what is considered as international and what is considered as political. Potentially, there is therefore a broad group of scholars who speak of practice. What this means for practice theorists remains unclear. Scholars writing in the context of the practice turn in IR argue that the language of practice theories can theorise practices in helpful ways that go beyond what was present in IR already, thereby enriching our analytical understanding of practice. However, the usefulness of this analytical language arguably depends on how and what we capture to be part of the practice theoretical programme.

Second, while loosely uniting around the concept of practice, in social and political theory practice theories are by definition plural, diverse, and multi-faceted – and this is their strength. But we can see selective tendencies as to how they have been introduced to IR. Further, from the beginning, there have also been attempts to unify practice theories in order to make the programme more appealing to the discipline – and potentially put it on par with the established ‘grand’ theories of IR (Adler and Pouliot 2011). This selective-

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1 First published in 1990.
ness of IR touches both upon who is recognized as a practice theorist and what are recognized as essential features of practice. Practice theories in IR chiefly recur on a comparatively limited range of canonical white male Western sociologists. As Lauren Wilcox has highlighted, this list does not even include hyper-prominent gender theorist Judith Butler whose work speaks very clearly to practices (Wilcox 2017). Even though such omissions may be happenstance, they clearly point to exclusionary dynamics in IR’s ‘practice turn’.

Another aspect of selectiveness touches upon basic conceptualizations of practice. Practices are deeply procedural; they only reveal their own conditions of possibility through how they are performed in social contexts. While their embodied and non-verbal character is vital to how many social and political theorists understand practices, this dimension is typically less prominent in IR iterations. Instead, IR has often privileged practices of ‘saying’, or what I call verbal practices, relegating the notion of practices that are non-verbal, bodily, embodied or performed by bodies to less relevant afterthoughts. They end up being subsumed into discursive practices rather than treated as a distinct source of the social.

To my mind, these are problematic omissions both historically and at present because they limit the significant analytical potential of practice theories to a singular (and seemingly exclusive) group of scholars, understandings, and conceptualizations. These omissions need to be critically addressed in order for practice theories to fulfil their potential. Practice theories have much more to gain from not only remaining diverse, but also from actively expanding that diversity.

**Practices and norms**

We can identify a number of analytical themes that have animated new research in practice theories over time, dynamics of change or consolidation being a perennial topic. Investigating the relationship between practices and norms is another of these emerging topics. It started off with casting a critical look at how practice theoretical analyses that do not pay attention to norms or normative theory end up reifying existing power structures without problematizing them (Ralph and Gifkins 2017). Further contributors point to how practice theories can provide vantage points for normative critique (Schindler and Wille 2019). Indeed, I argue that examining the interplay of practices and norms can allow researchers to sketch out innovative analytical avenues that build on plural understandings of practices as verbal and non-verbal. Verbal practices are practices of saying; they are publicly voiced, considered, and negotiated. They are verbalised and discussed in some type of deliberative forum. And, as I addressed in the previous section, they de facto dominate IR scholarship on norms and on practice theories. Non-verbal practices refer to bodily performed, operational practices. Such non-verbal practices may be observable acts of doing but also include non-observable thought processes that go into/precede acts of doing. The concept of non-verbal practices also captures practices of violence or practices performed in the service of violence. Paraphrasing Cynthia Enloe (2014), I argue that the workings of norms can be exposed by making especially the non-verbal practices of a wider range of actors visible. Conceptually, practices and norms are not easily separable as the content of norms only manifests itself in the practices that are performed to enact and sustain it.

**How practices shape norms: weaponizing AI**

My conceptual thoughts on normativity emerging in practices that are not verbalized are inspired by empirical observations relating to the international

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**AUTONORMS**

Dr Ingvild Bode is the Principal Investigator of an ERC project (StG) entitled ‘Transforming Norms Research Through Practices: Weaponised Artificial Intelligence, Norms, and Order (AUTONORMS)’. Together with a project team she studies how autonomous weapon systems shape and transform international norms governing the use of force. Analytically, the project combines practice theories and critical norm research to garner new insights into how practices make and shape norms. The AUTONORMS project examines norms via practices performed across different contexts, such as the military or the popular imagination, in four countries (USA, China, Japan, Russia). The project is hosted by the Centre for War Studies, University of Southern Denmark and runs from August 2020–July 2025.
debate on integrating AI-driven technologies into weapon systems. Often, these technologies are referred to as lethal autonomous weapons systems or LAWS, defined as ‘weapons that, once activated, can select and engage targets without further human intervention’ (Heyns 2016). Since 2017, international debate on this topic happens chiefly in the context of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Systems (CCW) at the United Nations in Geneva. Here, the notion of meaningful human control has been introduced as a potential new norm to govern the integration of AI-driven features in weapons systems. If the debate proceeded towards a negotiation stage, weapon systems without meaningful human control could be prohibited. Interestingly, the debate on LAWS speaks to the future rather than the present or the past. As a consequence, it rarely speaks to how AI-driven features have already been integrated into the critical – that is, targeting – functions of widely used weapon systems.

Some of these technologies, such as air defence systems, have been in use by a global spread of states for decades (Bode and Watts 2021). In this time, non-verbal practices of testing, developing, and operating air defence systems have incrementally contributed to shaping an emerging, silent norm of ‘meaningful’ human control. I understand norms loosely as understandings of appropriateness (Bode and Huelss 2018). They do not necessarily point to what is universally appropriate, but often to what a particular group of actors deems as suitable in a particular context. This emerging norm is potentially undesirable if it comes to stand for what meaningful human control means in practice – a diminished decision-making capacity of human operators in specific use of force situations is seen as ‘appropriate’ and ‘acceptable’. In this, non-verbal practices have shaped a tacit understanding of ‘meaningful’ human control that runs counter to explicit, verbal efforts of shaping normativity. In fact, the international debate on LAWS has yet to acknowledge or scrutinize this emerging norm. How non-verbal practices shape norms therefore risks undercutting potential international efforts to regulate LAWS through codifying human control in a deliberative forum such as the GGE.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a lot in practice theories to inspire innovative theorizing. Indeed, thinking about how practices constitute the social allows us to reveal the inner workings of phenomena in international relations. But that potential is arguably tied to increasing rather than decreasing the theoretical sources of the practice turn in IR to go beyond what has become a canonical list of practice theorists. In going beyond selectivity, practice theories can animate unusual analyses of empirical puzzles – including critical approaches to the normative pull of non-verbal practices.

References


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Profile page

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In 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping initiative (A4P), which aims to renew engagement with UN peacekeeping among member states, the Security Council, host countries, troop- and police-contributing countries, regional partners, and financial contributors. The A4P initiative seeks to improve peacekeeping and overcome a variety of challenges, including unfocused mandates, more complex threat environments, personnel and equipment shortages, and political obstacles to conflict resolution. Like many reform efforts that have come before, A4P is largely a top-down initiative. It calls on member states and the UN Secretariat to make peace operations ‘fit for the future’ by implementing a series of commitments in eight priority areas, thereby driving change at the field level. This understanding of change is incomplete, however. High-level decisions are certainly important, but recent scholarship shows that much of what peacekeepers do on a daily basis is best understood through the lens of practice. Instead of basing their actions on conscious decisions about how to implement specific rules or policies, blue helmets rely on tacit knowledge that is rooted in experience. This knowledge provides ‘automatic responses’ to the world around them; alternative ways of thinking and acting are, in many cases, not even considered (Autesserre 2014: 32).

A practice-based approach helps us recognize the wide-ranging impact of tacit knowledge in UN peace operations. It overcomes the ‘representational bias’ of other theories by foregrounding the habits and taken-for-granted routines – practices like writing reports and going on patrol – that constitute peacekeeping (Pouliot 2008: 258). To date, however, practice theory has mostly been used to explain continuity in peace operations. It overcomes the ‘representational bias’ of other theories by foregrounding the habits and taken-for-granted routines – practices like writing reports and going on patrol – that constitute peacekeeping (Pouliot 2008: 258). To date, however, practice theory has mostly been used to explain continuity in peace operations. In doing so, it yields important insights that can help address many of the weaknesses and contradictions that afflict contemporary peacekeeping (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 154–155; von Billerbeck 2020: 15). Yet peacekeeping practices do change, and gaps remain in how practice theorists account for those changes. One of the most pressing questions concerns the extent to which change flows from conscious reflection or from incremental, ‘unthinking’ adjustments in practice that accumulate over time (Hopf 2018: 2). Drawing on evidence from UN missions in Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), I find that practice change can occur through both reflection and small, reflexive adjustments.

Change occurs through reflection when peacekeepers critically examine existing practices and choose to embrace new patterns of action, often by re-combining familiar practices. They might, for example, recognize that existing practices related to protection of civilians are not working and then collectively reflect on how to improve them. In contrast, ‘unthinking’ change occurs when practitioners make a series of small, gradual changes to existing practices without reflecting on their broader implications. Small changes like this are ubiquitous. Peacekeepers must constantly adjust their practices to suit shifting circumstances, using their own judgment and inventiveness as they go. In Sierra Leone, for instance, blue helmets adjusted their interpretation of the mission’s rural outreach policy based on interactions with different communities. These incremental changes can quickly become precedents that other practitioners use to guide future action, potentially leading to dramatic changes in practice.

Evidence from UN peace operations also helps us understand when we are likely to see one type of change or the other. Three findings stand out. First, moments of crisis are conducive to change through reflection. Practice theorists – like many other scholars – have long argued that there is a close relationship between crisis, reflection, and change. Crises tend to bring the ‘undiscussed into discussion’ (Bourdieu 1977: 168). This does not mean that crises will always lead to change.

1 Confidential interview with a former UNAMSIL peacekeeper, interview by the author. November 2013, Freetown, Sierra Leone.
Still, as one peacekeeper told me, crisis can disrupt established patterns of action that would otherwise pass unremarked; failure can force blue helmets to reflect and understand why familiar practices have stopped ‘working.’

Recognizing that crisis fosters change through reflection does not tell us very much about the process by which it unfolds. Here, there is a second finding that highlights the interplay between reflection and ‘unthinking’ types of change. Even when peacekeepers deliberate, that process is shaped by other habits and predispositions that continue to operate in the background (Schmidt 2014: 820). In the context of UN peacekeeping, one such habit is a tendency to rely on specialized knowledge and thematic expertise. For example, high-level expert reports like the Brahimi Report or the 2015 HIPPO Report supply concepts and narratives that UN personnel can invoke to justify new patterns of action. They serve this purpose – functioning as ‘change management’ tools – because peacekeepers collectively view them as authoritative and take their implementation to be a worthwhile and legitimate activity (Andersen 2018: 5).

Finally, evidence from UN peace operations suggests that some peacekeepers are more likely to drive change through reflection than others. Those who occupy senior positions in the mission hierarchy – especially Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Force Commanders, for instance – are more likely to engage in critical reflection about existing practices. Again, this does not mean that every senior leader will do so. Large bureaucracies like the UN are prone to inertia, and many will not. Rather, it shows that senior leaders have a degree of authority and autonomy that makes it easier for them to question established patterns of action. In contrast, peacekeepers who occupy more junior positions are more likely to be constrained by an organizational culture that prizes rule-following. This pattern underlines the role of power differentials when it comes to explaining practice change.

These findings are not exhaustive. More research is needed to refine our understanding of practice change in UN peace operations and beyond. For now, though, two things are clear. First, applying the lens of practice to peace operations provides critical insights patterns across time and space in UN missions, including habits and practices that undermine peacekeepers’ effectiveness (Autesserre 2014: 35–36). These insights can be leveraged to address problems that would otherwise be poorly understood. Second, a detailed examination of day-to-day peacekeeping practices can improve our understanding of how practice change occurs, thereby contributing to wider conversations among practice theorists. Perhaps more importantly, it can supplement top-down theories of change in international organizations and provide a more nuanced understanding of how to bring about concrete changes at the field level.

References


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Profile

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International practice theory has proven a productive way of studying issues ranging from diplomacy to piracy to international organizations. In importing concepts coming from the sociology of Bourdieu, Boltanski and others to make sense of international phenomena, scholars have often consciously deconstructed the idea of ‘international practice theory,’ reflecting on what ‘practice’ encompasses and what ‘theory’ is. Perhaps ironically, there has been less reflection on what the ‘international’ part of the equation means. What makes a practice an ‘international practice?’ Is it the fact that it takes place within an international organization, such as the United Nations or NATO? That it pertains to an international issue, such as nuclear deterrence, military intervention, peace operations? That it involves international actors, such as Amnesty International? Or is a practice international because the person who studies it identifies as an international relations scholar?

This piece is an invitation to reflect on what the ‘international’ in ‘international practice theory’ stands for. In particular, I argue that international practice research would benefit from engaging with postcolonial understandings of the ‘international.’ Postcolonialism proposes an understanding of the ‘international’ that emphasizes mutual constitution (between the colonies and the metropole, the periphery and the center) and the agency of a priori dominated actors. It challenges narratives that separate ‘the West’ from ‘the rest,’ in particular the Eurocentric ‘Big Bang Theory’ of world history that assumes that modernity emerged endogenously in Europe before radiating outwards (Hobson 2012). Instead, postcolonialism emphasizes the way European identity and history are the result of encounters with other nations and peoples, in particular in the context of colonialism. In International Relations and in security studies, postcolonial scholars bring to the forefront ‘the mutually constitutive nature of world politics, the numerous and diverse ways in which the weak and the strong are bound’ (Barkawi and Laffey 2006: 345) and adopt a ‘processual ontology through which international relations of diverse kinds constitute the entities and phenomena that populate world politics’ (Barkawi and Laffey 2002: 114).

This way of understanding the social world shares many affinities with international practice research. Both practice theory and postcolonialism are based on a relational ontology that emphasizes the relations between things and actors rather than assuming their essential characteristics. Both reject methodological nationalism, the idea that nation-states are the natural containers of social relations. But what would it mean for practice theory to adopt postcolonialism’s understanding of the international? What would an ‘international’ practice look like when seen through the lens of postcolonialism?

The birth of modern policing

A postcolonial approach to international practice research emphasizes the processes of mutual constitution by which practices come about. It means that a practice is international not because of who carries it out or because of where it occurs, but because its genealogy is international. A good example of this is policing. How is policing an international practice, as understood through a postcolonial lens? Scholars have shown that policing tends to be increasingly globalized and transnationalized. In a context where states see a convergence between inside and outside threats (such as in the case of terrorism), the traditional divide between police at home and military abroad appears to be eroding. But the idea that policing is becoming transnational in response to contemporary developments is missing part of the story. Policing has always been transnational, because modern policing was forged in the crucible of colonialism.
and imperialism. Processes of state formation in the metropole and colonies were intertwined, in particular when it came to the creation of the state security apparatus. Importantly, this process was not a one-way street, with metropoles exporting policing to colonies. Looking at the example of US colonization of the Philippines, Alfred McCoy (2009) shows that US experience in setting up a police force in the Philippines was highly influential in the creation of US domestic policing capacity. Similar dynamics existed in the British and French empires.

How did this process of mutual constitution happen? Individuals circulated between the colonies and the metropoles, importing and exporting experience from one context to another. In the case of the US, August Vollmer and Smedley Butler are two well-known examples of this dynamic. Vollmer served in the Philippines and went on to become chief of police in Berkeley, California, and wrote a highly influential textbook on modern policing. Butler created the Haitian police during the US occupation of the country and then served as police chief of Philadelphia in 1924, where he led a campaign of modernization. Looking at the more recent period of the Cold War, Stuart Schrader (2019) documents how many of the US police trainers sent to ‘allied’ states during the Cold War went on to occupy positions in US domestic law enforcement.

Mutual constitution also occurred because those in power established homologies between populations to be governed in the colonies and populations to be governed ‘at home.’ Ideas about race, class and gender were constructed through the colonial experience in ways that intertwined metropoles and colonies. As Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (1997: 9) argue, there was a ‘resonance and reverberation between European class politics and colonial racial policies.’ For instance, ‘in nineteenth-century South Africa or turn-of-the-century East Africa, the British used a vocabulary to describe Africans remarkably like that used at home to describe the lowest elements of the class order, ‘the residuum’, the degraded class of criminals and casual laborers of Victorian cities’ (Cooper and Stoler 1997: 27). This was a two-way street, involving both the racialization of class representations and the transfer of racial discourses to class politics. The migration of colonial populations to metropoles in the 20th century intensified these homologies. In the US, ‘[..] political elites and urban upper and middle classes viewed these minority populations [urban immigrants including African Americans, Japanese and Chinese] in the same racialized terms that they classified colonized peoples’ (Go 2020b: 1214).

**For a postcolonial international practice research**

The birth of modern policing challenges the distinction between local and international, between national and transnational. Modern policing should be understood as a postcolonial field marked by the international circulation of policing practices. The concept of field was developed in Bourdieu’s practice theory, and although Bourdieu did not explicitly address transnational or global phenomena, several scholars argue that the concept is particularly well-placed to do so. In the last few years, there has been a conscious effort to try and ‘scale up’ Bourdieu’s field theory to think about transnationalism (Go and Krause 2016; Schmidt-Wellenburg and Bernhard 2020). According to Monika Krause (2020: 99), ‘Bourdieu’s work offers significant resources for a social science that seeks to escape methodological nationalism and, with that, seeks to overcome the a priori divide between the national and the interna-tional toward a more open investigation into patterns of the world’.

I argue that postcolonialism provides a particularly good lens to scale field theory up in a way that overcomes traditional dichotomies between national/international and inside/outside. Postcolonialism invites us to see how the ‘international’ is at play even in fields that seem a priori domestic (such as policing), by stressing two important dynamics: mutual constitution, and the agency of the subaltern. In this sense, practices are not international because they are diffused from one locale to another, but because they are constituted through international encounters.

Dominated groups such as colonial subjects played a key role in shaping modern policing during these international encounters. Although the colonial field of policing was characterized by sharp inequalities, we cannot understand it if we focus only on those who hold power. A postcolonial approach thus leads to de-emphasizing the role of elites (such as diplomats or security professionals) that is shared by much of the work done in international practice research, to
interrogate how those against whom power is wielded shape practices.

In the case of the birth of modern policing, the agency of the subaltern is apparent from the responses that it generated. In his history of how tear gas came to be used for crowd control in the British empire and eventually in the UK itself, Erik Linstrum shows that there was originally strong resistance from imperial officials to deploy tear gas even against colonial populations. While proponents presented it as both ‘more humane’ and less likely to produce martyrs than more traditional responses to unrest and rebellion, chemical weapons were still associated with German actions during WWI. It is only as anticolonial movements from Punjab to Palestine put increased pressure on the empire in the 1920s that resistance was overcome, and gas was used for the first time against a crowd in Burma in 1939 (Linstrum 2019). The use of tear gas for crowd control is a practice that has an international genealogy, and which has been shaped by the agency of those who are policed.

Conclusion

Does it make sense to think of the contemporary world in postcolonial terms? Is the contemporary field of policing postcolonial? The idea that colonial patterns of power persist in our contemporary world is of course at the center of postcolonialism. As others have argued, the field of global policing today is still characterized by ‘multi-directional travelling of practices across the globe as well as the active agency and participation of seemingly ‘marginal’ actors in producing and co-constituting what is conventionally thought of as ‘Western’ policing practice, knowledge and institutions’ (Hönke and Müller 2016).

If we indeed live in a postcolonial world, a postcolonial international practice research can help us illuminate how the practices of domestic and international security are mutually constituted, how governing ‘at home’ and intervening ‘abroad’ are intimately linked, and how the production of domestic social order and global order go hand in hand.

References


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The Tragic Practice of Prevention

Pol Bargués and Jessica Schmidt

The ideas of resilience and security are increasingly linked to prevention and early action in global security governance. Policy programmes assist societies to become resilient by preventing violent extremism through inclusive development or preventing conflicts by defusing tensions and engaging with civil society actors. Clearly, preventing a conflict, a disaster, or the spread of a virus is not as epic as solving a conflict, recovering from a disaster or ending a pandemic. Images of prevention are rarely spectacular (the cover of an influential UN report on conflict prevention is just a woman placing a candle in a religious site). Prevention does not mobilise the attention of the media or set ephemerides. Yet the logic is that ‘preventing conflicts is more efficient and effective than engaging with crises after they break out. Once a conflict does erupt, it typically becomes ever more intractable over time’, recognised the EU in its Global Strategy of 2016.

In this short essay, we delve into practices of prevention to draw out some unique features of today’s ever-expanding regimes of governance. While traditional framings of prevention mainly centred on removing immediate threats to international security, via quick and targeted diplomatic, police or military action, today’s logic of prevention is different: prevention assumes both the impossibility to get satisfactory results and the need for further action. It demands prudent people, workaholic policymakers, and sleepless nights. In the following we show this by looking into two examples of practices of prevention from our everyday experiences (prevention of accidents in forestry and of Covid-19 contagion) that are representative of broader imaginaries of governance.

Little fires everywhere: Preventing accidents in work life

The world of forests, chainsaws and tree felling is embedded in discourses of occupational health and safety.¹ There is a constant concern with prevention.

¹ I (Jessica Schmidt) have been working as manager of occupational competences and certifications of chainsaw operators since 2019 and before that was working as a lumberjack myself. These are reflections on some trends in the practice of prevention in forestry.

Undeniably, there is a very legitimate reason to be concerned with prevention: accidents occur and, tragically, they are sometimes lethal.

These discourses of prevention are firmly rooted in a Cartesian–Newtonian imaginary where humans stand apart from their environment. In this imaginary, accidents can be reduced to causes. Once analysed, those causes can be eliminated. Choice-making is assumed to be rational. ‘Wrong’ choices – choices that have led to accidents – are a consequence of irrationality: bad leadership, insufficient competences, standard working procedures not fully complied with, sloppiness, etc. Problematised as a function of rationality/irrationality, the underlying working assumption is always: accidents can be prevented.

As part of a global initiative in occupational health and safety that started in 2013, all major occupational social insurers in Germany have adopted ‘Vision Zero’. Vision Zero is based on three principles: First, ‘every accident is avoidable’. Secondly, ‘accidents do not occur at random’, and thirdly, ‘learning is key to success’ (DGUV Prevention Yearbook 2014/15: 31). The proclaimed goal of Vision Zero is to prevent any occupational accident from happening. ‘Considered utopian only a few years ago, this goal is now becoming more and more realistic’, reads the enthusiastic declaration (DGUV Prevention Yearbook 2014/15: 31).

What does this seemingly heroic aim of total prevention imply for governance? It starts with the way accidents must necessarily be framed in the prevention paradigm. Not as singular occurrences – triggered by fate, destiny or God’s will – but as cracks in a potentially perfect system. This system is man-made, controlled and considered controllable by humans. Each accident, therefore, signals the absence of proper regulation, indicates lack of governance and necessitates better procedures to follow (Zwetsloot et al. 201: 43; Hohnen and Hasle 2011). As a sign, each accident must therefore be generalised and abstracted into a new norm, regulation or procedure, a new form to be filled in, a new behavioural guideline to follow. Then the difference between the concrete and the abstract collapses.
Constant failure and frustrations are consequently built into the practice of this prevention regime. As long as accidents are considered preventable – and all else seems inhuman – safety managers necessarily become frustrated by each and every accident. ‘It was preventable!’ they claim. The safety managers have failed, once again, and are called into action, once again.

Each time they take action, workers’ work lifes are intervened upon. ‘You make our work impossible!’ they therefore shout at the safety managers. Workers in such environments of high preventionism become frustrated as they are to be turned into robots. They need to learn not only to fell trees safely but also to hold on to handrails when using stairs, or not to chew on pencil caps to avoid suffocation – all in the name of their humanity. At the receiving end of incessant intervention, they are constantly called upon to diligently follow new procedures and regulations. Workers become constantly problematised in their very decision-making and there is no end in sight. Vision Zero ‘invites us to a process that is never finally completed’ (DGUV Forum (2020): 19, our translation).

It is hard to argue against a vision that seeks to eliminate all accidents in the name of workers’ health, safety and wellbeing. Who would not agree that the prevention of suffering, of bodily integrity and so on is not a basic human right? In the name of human rights, prevention becomes a highly productive, endless, self-reproducing intervention machine. ‘We must intervene more’, proclaims the Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV Prevention Yearbook 2014/15: 11). The legitimacy of prevention knows no limits. As long as there are accidents, further measures for prevention seem not only to constantly call upon those who must design them, but also are beyond question and critique by those in whose name these measures are taken.

**Viruses everywhere: Preventing the spread of Covid-19**

In 2020 and 2021, national lockdowns that instruct people to stay at home and social distancing measures have been imposed worldwide to control the Covid-19 pandemic. In bouncing forward to a new normality where societies must learn to live with the virus, a regime of prevention has been installed by authorities, doctors, celebrities, the media, and fellow citizens. Individuals must act extremely cautiously, even ‘overreact’ and ‘panic early’, to avoid contagion (Cobb 2020). Even when there is apparently little risk of transmitting the virus, the precautionary principle applies. In framings that call for extreme precaution,
one single individual is a potential risk for the whole because of the endless unknowns and what ifs (what if I am asymptomatic, what if the surface is infected, what if the virus travels widely in aerosol particles?) and the high degree of connectivity of our lives (Taleb and Norman 2020).

Like the discourses of safety in the forestry world, who can argue against a regime of prevention? Wave after wave, the virus has decimated entire families, collapsed hospitals, and sunk business, often harming the most vulnerable. An outbreak here may lead to a catastrophe somewhere else. Thus, the need for extreme precaution to prevent contagion has turned into a mantra, an omnipotent social consensus, that is celebrated, lectured, and enforced.

However, like the discourses of safety to prevent accidents, precautionary approaches to stop contagion only work in theory. In practice, the erratic behaviour of the pandemic constantly frustrates acts of prevention. Unexpectedly, sometimes those who throw caution out of the window are well and healthy, while the most careful, conscientious citizen became infected. ‘Where could this happen? What might she have possibly overlooked?’, ask her colleagues. The disease spreads non-linearly and resurges or disappears startlingly. When an outbreak occurs, the blame is on hubristic, careless, self-centred individuals who were not cautious enough. Everyone seems unsatisfied, regretful, and winces at others’ behaviour. Authorities and medical experts lament that their recommendations are overlooked, while neighbours, colleagues and friends tell how others acted imprudently and egoistically. Society is exerting pressure on everyone to act always more sensibly.

The regime of precaution to stop the spread of Covid-19 is maddening because ethically it appears utterly most valuable, indisputable in theory, but even the most sensible, prudent gesture appears insufficient. In times of pandemic, one cannot be cautious or certain enough: How much distance should people keep? Is it save to meet, to travel, open businesses, or organise events? New restrictions, regulations, and recommendations are established. Generally, the more always the better.

Conclusion

What is striking in the paradigm of prevention is that it is ever-expanding, propelled by the aspiration to arrest the infinite and anticipate disaster. In practice, the logic is tragic: prevention seems always necessary, but it is always in the wrong. Prevention measures arrive a bit too late, or are insufficient, incomplete. In both examples — the prevention of accidents in occupational safety and of contagion in times of pandemic — authorities embrace the need to try and fail forward, and demand always more governance, regulation, and control. The idea of resilience finds its expression not only in the adaptation to shocks, disasters or crises, but also in the endless prevention of risks.

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China’s Strategic Practices in the Belt and Road Initiative

Max Lesch and Dylan M.H. Loh

The harbour of Duisburg, Germany is the final node of the ‘New Silk Road’ connecting Europe and China via direct railroad link. As part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), several infrastructure projects, including not only railroads but also harbours and roads, contribute to an emerging economic network spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa. Whereas China touts these projects as integrative and transparent endeavours towards peace and prosperity, politicians, observers, and researchers (mostly in the west) are cautious about the security implications of the BRI as part of Chinese hegemonic ambitions likely to disrupt the international order. This reflects the focus in security studies on the rise of China and its effects on international order. What is more, the literature frequently takes the strategic implications of China’s military activities in the Asian-Pacific region as its main empirical reference. In contrast, studying BRI projects as international (infrastructure) practices, allows us to shed light on their materiality and performative effects on international security politics (Bueger and Gadinger 2015).

In this article, we sketch how international practice theories can inform security studies and research on the BRI. By unpacking the ambiguity of BRI infrastructure practices in Asia and Europe, we demonstrate that, while China depicts railroad links as lifelines for economic development and harbours as hubs for mutually beneficial trade, critics see railroads as intrusions on national autonomy and harbours as toeholds for economic and military influence. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of BRI practices for the international order.

International practices, field-overlaps, and norms

International practices are situated in ‘fields’ – understood as relatively autonomous spaces wherein various actors compete and cooperate for incentives and resources (Bourdieu 1977). To name a few examples in the field of international security, this can include the practice of maintaining military bases abroad, peacekeeping missions, or performing military manoeuvres. These practices can be carried out more or less competently according to the norms that govern the particular field (Adler and Pouliot 2011). More often than not, actors enact these practices based on their tacit background knowledge. While this usually contributes to a reproduction of existing practices, norms, and orders, fields become unsettled when practices cut across several spaces. Scholars have shown, for instance, how Chinese diplomats’ sensibilities, personal histories, and the field of diplomacy in China predispose more assertive and strident diplomatic practices in the international arena (Loh 2020). In a similar vein, the effects of BRI practices cannot be fully grasped when analysed within an individual field and its norms. Drawing from Luc Boltanski’s (2011) notions of ‘orders of worth’, we argue that international actors – states, non- or sub-state actors – incite the contestation of the BRI by drawing on competing norms. In other words, what shapes the international dynamics of the BRI emerge from the active overlapping of fields.

Engaging with Bourdieu’s concept of field and Boltanski’s orders of worth, we argue first that clashing normative visions of the field (such as what counts as a ‘competent and viable’ infrastructural project) comes to the fore at the point of field overlaps. Second, we argue that multiple field-anchored norms come to bear when fields overlap and actors stabilise, modify, or disrupt the meaning of international practices. This lends agency to weaker actors and their potential to successfully challenge incumbents of a field (Evans and Kay 2008). Tying in with relational approaches in security studies to discursive formations of threats and danger (e.g., Campbell 1998), we zoom in on the materiality of international practices and how actors make sense of and contest international practices in
overlapping fields. The politics of BRI practices epitomize the struggle about China's position in the world and its effects on foreign and security policies that will shape international order.

In the next section, we map how BRI infrastructure practices – the construction of railroad links and the investments in deep-sea ports – play out in overlapping field dynamics before we turn to the implications for international order.

The contestation of Belt and Road infrastructure practices

Across the globe, China invests in deep-sea ports as part of the maritime links of the BRI. In the Indian Ocean, for instance, the Hambantota Port Project in Sri Lanka demonstrates how Chinese investments, including easily accessible loans and construction expertise from Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), can become security issues, beyond their intended economic benefits. After Sri Lanka was unable to service its debt to China, the Sri Lankan government handed over the port and 15,000 acres of land around it for 99 years to China in 2017 (Abi-Habib 2018). This transfer gave China a commercial, and possibly military, footprint in the Indian Ocean. It shows how loans dished out to struggling regimes can entrench patron-client relationships that build dependency and reliance. What has been promoted by China as an economic investment turned into a security issue with various international actors – for better or worse – using the Hambantota Port example as a cautionary tale. More recently, Portuguese officials have uttered similar concerns about Chinese moves in its strategically important deep-sea harbour of Sines. What began as a Chinese investment in one of the four terminals at Sines, has now triggered calls upon the United States to oppose Chinese moves at the port in order to counter the Chinese foray into Europe through its BRI practices.

In a similar vein, railroad links spanning the Eurasian continents have been met with ambiguous reactions. The case of Duisburg is illustrative for cities, regions, or states that struggle to adjust to socio-economic transformations and hope for economic renaissance based on closer ties to China under the BRI umbrella. At the same time, the perception of BRI infrastructure projects depends on the norms – orders of worth – used as metrics to evaluate them. Disputes thus come to the fore when domestic or regional actors
challenge, redefine and recast the BRI’s economic prospects to a security or diplomatic issue, thereby unsettling BRI narratives and inviting greater scrutiny. For instance, a BRI project to build a 350-km, $2.89 billion rail link between Belgrade and Budapest, lauded as a hallmark project of the BRI, was investigated by EU officials to determine whether ‘it had violated European Union laws stipulating that public tenders must be offered for large transport projects’ (Kynge, Beesley, and Byrne 2017). Given the increasing promotion of the BRI by China, the EU took the step of declaring China a ‘systemic rival’ in 2019 (European Commission 2019: 1). In Southeast Asia, the contestation of BRI practices plays out even more dramatically in the case of the Malaysian East Coast Rail Link project. This project – a highlight of Malaysia–China ties and a flagship BRI project – was initiated by the Najib administration. After Najib’s electoral loss, the new Prime Minister – Mahathir Mohamad – quickly halted the project, citing unsustainable costs and worries over the true economic benefits. He further sounded a warning, in a state visit to China, against any ‘new form of colonialism’ through the dangling of huge economic projects (Hornby 2018). Tying in with the concern about Chinese investments in deep-sea ports discussed above, Malaysia also announced that it will scale down a deep-sea port worth US $7.5bn that is being built by CITIC Group of China, also as part of the BRI.

In sum, we see how BRI practices traverse (at least) an economic and military or security field in which differing norms (orders of worth) are used to assess each initiative and project by local actors. Where fields intersect, this does not only grant agency to recipient countries to challenge BRI practices. It has also triggered concerns within China that the SOEs responsible for the implementation of the BRI have behaved ‘recklessly and illegally overseas, with disastrous consequences for Chinese diplomacy’ (Jones and Zeng 2019: 1427). The BRI and its contestation, thus, intersects with the field of diplomacy in which some Chinese officials fear a weakening of their position vis-à-vis their counterparts from Europe and Asia.

Implications for international order

In this article, we highlighted the disputes and controversies generated from two sets of BRI practices—the construction of and investments in railroad links and harbours both, in Asia and Europe. This is not meant to provide a generalized argument about the BRI but rather, to provide some clues as to how the BRI is implemented and perceived by recipients. Our illustrations above show that when practices do not match rhetoric, or when they conflict with existing normative structures (orders worth raising project fairness, debt transparency, open bidding, awarding of contracts and so forth), this is likely to lead to criticism and disputes.

In Europe, the disruptive effects of BRI practices have become visible at the point of implementation. This disruption is manifest in the competing legal standards and practices of China and the EU. But disagreements over legality and transparency are not the only points of contention. The European concern for China’s human rights record, for instance, has potentially reached a tipping point between the European Union and China. Nevertheless, China’s courting of Europe has yielded some results. Italy, for example, embraced the BRI and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China on the initiative. Other countries such as Greece and Switzerland have positively affirmed the BRI. Yet as the above analysis has shown, countries supporting the BRI are not without agency. The example of Malaysia shows that signing on to the project does not preclude recipient states from (successfully) challenging BRI practices.

While the EU and Western countries couch their opposition to the BRI in terms of the normative and discursive lenses of ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’, we see other countries like Malaysia and Vietnam preferring terms like ‘non-interference’ or ‘new colonialism’ and invoking the sanctity of sovereignty. The Chinese lending policies in particular seem to put a growing strain on the range of action for recipient countries. The concerns about the Chinese role in Portuguese harbours, for instance, shows that in Europe, too, the BRI is increasingly viewed as a (regional) security issue. On the one hand, we see contestation of the BRI incited by their own operative rules and promises; as repeatedly stated by various state leaders, the infrastructural-economic aspects of the BRI are to be welcomed. On the other hand, many countries are concerned about the norms that the BRI brings with it as well as its security implications. As the BRI continues to evolve, so does its role in international ordering as a constant achievement of practice, including the construction of perceptions of China in that order.

References


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Power and Practice in Global Politics: From Private Security to the Global Right

A Talk with Centre fellows Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams

Quarterly Magazine: Security is interesting because what security is, and what feels secure changes almost every day. So, the question arises, what actually defines security? Can you provide examples from your research?

Rita Abrahamsen: The current pandemic climate certainly is a good illustration of your question and the subjective nature of security, and I think that we all somehow feel more insecure today. It reminds me very much of the work that we did on private security, where one of the key arguments was that security is also about knowledge; the more you become aware of your potential insecurity, the more insecure you feel, even if, perhaps objectively, that is not the case. This subjective nature of security and its link to knowledge and risk, we argued, is one of the reasons for the rapid expansion and globalization of the global private security sector. The more we become aware of our insecurity, the more security we want to buy and the more we seek experts to trust, but in both cases this can sometimes intensify feelings of insecurity rather than relieve them.

Michael C. Williams: At a purely conceptual level, you can see security as a good, in the sense of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc., or you could see security as a language and logic of danger, a feeling of danger. Security operates between those two things within a kind of continuum of risk. What one sees is how different things, different practices – viruses for instance, or automobiles – move along a scale of what we can almost call riskification: it’s not always an objective thing, it’s not always driven by objective risks, it’s driven by the massive amounts of politics, perceptions, and feelings. Again, in our work of security privatization, we saw this very clearly, in the sense that the expansion of the sector was closely linked to an awareness and subjective feeling of insecurity.

QM: It also means that a lot depends on who is telling the story. Could you comment on the question of legitimation strategies that comes along with this?

Abrahamsen: There has been quite a lot of debate around the extent to which private security in its various forms is legitimate, particularly in the early literature that focused mostly on mercenaries and private military companies. Our own work has been primarily focused on what we could call private policing or commercial security outside direct military engagement or conflict, although the boundaries are often very difficult to draw. In terms of legitimation, our research showed how the various practices of private security are legitimized by virtue of being deeply embedded within various governance structures and norms and values of governing. So, in part this is about the strategies of the private security companies themselves, but it is also about the practices of governance of governments, corporations and individuals in their everyday lives. One of the arguments we make in our research is that private security is legitimized by virtue of their connections to public authority, or to the state and international organizations like the UN. In this sense, it’s quite interesting to note that the debate about legitimacy seems to have faded quite a bit and these companies are perceived and treated internationally as much more legitimate than they were 10 years ago. On the African continent, where we did...
most of our empirical work, more militarized mercenary activities were perceived as quite illegitimate in the early and mid 2000s. At the moment, private military companies are heavily involved in for example Cabo Delgado in Mozambique and in the Central African Republic, but it doesn’t seem to attract much attention in the international media or in academic work.

Williams: When we began, our research was on commercial security, but the background to it was the growth of private military activities. If you take a look at the huge controversies around private military involvement in Sierra Leone in the late 1990s - early 2000s: massive international coverage, massive amounts of concerned people up in arms over the idea that Executive Outcomes was there, as well as the British company Sandline. If you contrast that to what is going on in northern Mozambique today, it’s quite striking. There’s absolutely nothing like the kind of reaction that you saw 20 years ago. And so, something has really quite profoundly changed. Part of this is the expertise and experience that private security companies have acquired over time, as well as the way in which they have been legitimized by virtue of being included in various security interventions by states and international organizations, doing various logistical jobs in peacekeeping operations, protecting refugee camps, clearing mines and so on. They’ve done a very good job in making the argument that they have the expertise; they have the experience. These kinds of organizations are no longer that unusual; they’re all over the place. There hasn’t necessarily been a conscious decision by anybody to say, ‘these things are now much more legitimate’, it’s almost an incremental thing, whereby they become normalized.

Abrahamsen: I think also in terms of the practice, it is a gradual thing. Once you’ve got this whole set of practices, of Public Private Partnerships, that says policing or security is not only the responsibility of the state, but also the responsibility of everyone, including business. We have this whole idea of business for peace, and everyone should kind of have a ‘whole of government’ approach, and the private actors should be part of that. You get institutionalized practices, institutionalized discourses that say that this is not only normal, but this is the way to do it.

QM: You talked about this ability of these paid companies to do logistical jobs and to work in different fields, which is in itself interesting because it expands the area of security that we are discussing. You are working on a book on the Merger of Development and Security. How deep are you in this topic at the moment?

Abrahamsen: Very deep, we are struggling to write that book right now (laughs.) But I’m glad you asked, since it connects to what we were just talking about, in the sense that it’s also a practice-oriented book. We are trying to explain, using Bourdieusian practice and field theory, how we got to where we are today in terms of the merger of security and development.

QM: I am interested in that point because of this idea of fields. Does this imply an understanding of security that transgresses the traditional fields of activity?
**Williams:** Absolutely. What we’re trying to do is to look at this historically, and we’re trying to treat development as a transnational field of practice that comes into being as an autonomous field, and therefore has certain specific dynamics, recognizes certain forms of authority and capital. While development has long historical roots, we argue that it only emerges as an autonomous field of practice after world war II and with decolonization. The story of the book is the way in which that field emerges, and then subsequently becomes radically transformed as part of broader struggles within the field and in interactions with other transnational fields and the broader field environment. So much so, that the development field today would have been literally incomprehensible to someone in the 1960s.

**Abrahamsen:** As a global field, as an autonomous field, development emerged in the midst of the Cold War, and while security was a central preoccupation at the time its relationship to development was very different. Security – which then was either about national security or peace – is sort of squeezed out of the field of international development. As part of the process of field autonomization, security, defence and the military become constituted as the opposite pole and in the book we analyse the dynamics and forms of capital involved in this transformation. When we get to the merger of development and security, which begins at the end of the cold war, and then escalates with the attacks of 9/11 and the preoccupation with the global war on terror, security is able to ‘invade’ the field of development. Security knowledge becomes development knowledge, as part of the well-known slogan that ‘there can be no development without security’. That is where you get to a point where military personnel and various security actors and their knowledge becomes part of development knowledge, and therefore they become powerful actors within the field of development.

**Williams:** When we first started thinking about this, we had spent a couple days at a goldmine in Tanzania, researching new security practices in resource extraction. The mine was completely cut off from the surrounded areas, surrounded by a 9km long, 10-foot-high concrete wall and barbed wire. The people we met inside were community development workers who were literally sitting in the same office as global private security operatives and working together with them. We just thought to ourselves: this would have been completely inconceivable in the 1950s and 60s, and yet here they are, not without tensions, but here they are, hand-in-hand, working for a global gold mining company in a walled compound. So, let’s try to figure out how on earth this could have happened. And that’s what we’re trying to do.

**Abrahamsen:** Let me add that as we tried to explain our experiences, we came to the conclusion that existing accounts could not really capture the multiple dynamics at play. For one, it was not only a merger of development and security, or a security-development nexus. It was also a merger of the corporate world with development – a corporate-development-security nexus, if you like. Another thing that was striking to us was that when we first started working on private security, the NGOs were mostly radically opposed to private security in all its forms, whereas a decade later they work hand in hand with security actors and corporate actors. The book seeks to provide a field and practice-based explanation for this transformation. One aspect of the explanation goes back to what we discussed previously, namely that NGOs came to realize that in many parts of the world they could not operate unless they themselves hired private security for protection – they frankly can’t work if they don’t have private security. Then, things also changed in terms of funding: NGOs must now have funding and partnerships with the private sector, and there is a strong push towards tripartite funding schemes involving states or international organizations, business and NGOs. There is much more to it, and in the book we seek to explain the transformations in the field through a focus on its specific forms of capital and what we call an interest in disinterest.

**QM:** There is a western preoccupation – even a paranoia – focussed on managing risk abroad in order to ensure security at home. Is the western idea of security, then an extension – or a remnant – of postcolonialism? Does postcolonial criticism factor into your research on development and security?

**Abrahamsen:** In many ways, yes absolutely, and we have both also written about this previously. For example, I wrote an article way back in 2005 called ‘Blair’s Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear’, which shows how the preoccupation with security at home can have very detrimental impacts for development ‘abroad’ and for people in the South. It’s very striking how the current development model prioritises security, and the danger is that the security of ‘here’ comes to take priority over the welfare and development of distant others. One of the things that interests us is how the field has transformed to such an extent that military and security actors can now claim development expertise, and how development actors are sometimes the most eager supporters of security solutions.

**QM:** At a recent practice theory conference at the Centre, there was a lively debate about how one can meet practitioners and how to generate trust with informants, particularly in the security area. Can you build trust over a zoom conference?
Abrahamsen: I think it would be very difficult – in fact impossible - to do the work we have done over zoom. I could not see how you can get the level of trust, how you can get people to open up. In the security field, there is often a lot of initial mistrust and suspicion that has to be overcome in the first encounters, and this would be very hard to do over zoom. Also, I think it’s much easier for potential interviewees simply to say ‘no’ to requests for a zoom meeting. It’s different when you turn up at their doorstep day after day.

QM: If you are a young researcher, you don’t know people, you have not grown network – relations that develop on the ground over the course of years. You can of course always write about the literature, but would this alter research strategies when it comes to fieldwork?

Williams: Our view is very strongly that to the extent you can, you have to go out there and engage with the area of practice that you are looking at. It is one thing to imagine what a mercenary or a private security contractor might be like, and its quite another to meet a bunch of them in real life. It changes your view. It changes also their view of you. And you will get different things from them, and you will learn different things by observing their routines and everyday practices. In our private security work, interviews and observations of the day to day routines of private and public security actors were invaluable, and often we learnt the most important things when we least expected it. The pandemic and the way it has paused fieldwork of all kinds poses a serious challenge for practice-based research, and this is particularly devastating for young researchers and for those who are in the middle of their PhD research.

QM: Let’s switch to the New Right. Rita, I was very interested to read a blog post which you wrote. I noted one sentence that I found perfect: ‘The Right Family attacks the liberal world order where it hurts most; at home.’ It was about the Geneva Consensus a right-wing international declaration that supports a very conservative picture of the family. Is this family ideology an issue that is directly linked to the new right?

Abrahamsen: Yes, absolutely. I think it’s fascinating because in the Global Right Research Project that we are both involved in, we’re really trying to see how the global right works at the level of ideas, of ideologies, and networks, and the family is one of the ways in which it tries to do this. The Geneva Consensus is one example but there are many other attempts to hone in on and defend the traditional family. On the surface these initiatives can sound quite innocent, but when you look a little closer they are all anti-gay, anti-same-sex marriage, and anti-abortion. There are several examples of trying to make international or transnational connections around this issue, and in opposition to accepted international values and conventions, like the International Declaration of Human Rights. And that’s why I say ‘the global right attacks the global order where it hurts the most; at home’ because sometimes we don’t appreciate why people support these movements. But many people are value-conservative, and the Global Right is mobilizing those kinds of sentiments – ‘we are defending you; we are just like you’ – it’s hard for nice, lefty, liberal intellectuals like ourselves to understand, but across the world, those kinds of viewpoints are often stronger than we’d like to admit.

QM: You mentioned there is a strategy, a politics of enmity.

Williams: We have an article in International Political Sociology where we explain this in more detail, and show how the Global Right has effectively mobilized a politics of enmity. One element of this is to build alliances. There is a quote in the article from Aleksandr Dugin that we really liked. He basically says ‘it doesn’t matter who you are, as long as you oppose what we oppose, you are our friend. We will make alliances with everyone as long as your dislikes are the same as ours, namely the current global order’. In this way, the strategy is quite ‘reactionary’; they don’t necessarily have a position of their own, they are reacting against something: if you can understand what they are reacting against, or what they say or feel they are reacting against, then you can begin to understand how they

Global Right Research Project

The rise of radical conservative political movements is one of the most striking developments in global politics. The project investigates the global rise of radical conservative political movements. These developments mark more than shifts in electoral politics. Above all, they represent a potentially momentous disruption of the liberal international order, whose regimes of human rights norms, free trade, alliance relations, and climate policies are increasingly subject to contestation.

Global Right is linked in research partnerships with the World Order Research Program at uOttawa’s Center for International Policy Studies [https://www.cips-cepi.ca/].

Project website: [https://globalright.ca/](https://globalright.ca/)
work, rather than looking for some unifying core that they all share, because most of the time they don’t. Another aspect of the politics of enmity is the identification of a clear enemy, namely what they call the ‘new elite’ of experts, international bureaucrats, and intellectuals, whom they contrast to the ordinary people.

**QM:** The radical right has often been accused of anti-intellectualism (climate change denial, misinformation campaigns, ‘fake news’). In your estimation, what are the intellectual motivations of the New Right?

**Williams:** An important part of our work has been precisely to debunk this view of the Right as anti-intellectual and plain dumb. It’s a tempting position, and obviously not all right-wing street protestors are closet intellectuals! Far from it, but in our view we underestimate the Global Right at our peril. Our work has thus in large part been about trying to uncover the intellectual roots, ideologies and political strategies of the contemporary Right, showing how there is a theoretical and ideological underpinning to much of their thinking and action.

**QM:** You are not researching authoritarianism of all sorts. You focus on specific racist-ideological configurations.

**Abrahamsen:** It is very difficult to define the Right or the Global Right. We have avoided the use of labels like populism and populist authoritarianism, and by and large we try to resist very strong definitions, or drawing very clear boundaries. In part this is because we see the Right as a fluid movement or ideology, and part of its success stems precisely from this fluidity and ability to build alliances. That said, one of the key themes we have focused on is the nativist element in much of the thinking of the Global Right. What unites many of these disparate groups is a nativist belief of where we come from and how we ought to organize life.

**Williams:** We think that in many of these cases there is something more going on than simply authoritarian populism. Our sense is that one needs to understand the specific articulations of this and then the way in which they try to make linkages across different national traditions.

**QM:** Rita and Michael, thank you both very much for this talk.

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**Rita Abrahamsen** in Professor in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and Director of the Centre for International Policy Studies (CIPS) at the University of Ottawa. She is the author (with M.C. Williams) of *Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and the Good Governance Agenda in Africa* (Zed Books, 2000); and numerous articles in international peer-reviewed journals.

**Michael C Williams** is University Research Professor in Global Political Thought in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa. He is the author (with Rita Abrahamsen) of *Security Beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); *Culture and Security* (Routledge 2009); and *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) as well numerous articles on international relations, security, and international political theory.
How does material culture shape international political dynamics in long-term trends? Can architectural and artistic styles, weapons technologies, dress codes, ceremonial objects and ritual practices influence how international politics is being conducted? I focus on representants – how they affect elites’ and publics’ understandings of which political entities exist in international relations, and how much power these entities hold.

The state, the European Union, or the papacy, to name a few examples, are vast units that no individual can experience in their entirety. Yet, most people have a shared sense of what these entities look like. This shared sense, I argue, is the result of representants.

Representants are those practices, artifacts, and language that make present ‘what is not immediately given in a situation’ (Bueger 2013: 340). The gothic cathedral represents the Church, the palace of Versailles absolutist French monarchy, diplomats their states in negotiations, and Cartesian maps the territorial state. Representants stand in for an entity as a whole when that entity can otherwise not be present in its entirety. Representants are crucial in international relations, given that the localities in which international relations take shape (the UN General Assembly, the NATO headquarters in Brussels, Münster and Osnabrück during the Peace of Westphalia, etc.) are to some extent removed from the domestic realm, and that international relations by their very nature deal with a macro realm that can never be fully present. The United States can never be fully present at a negotiation. It needs to be represented. How it is represented matters for international politics.

Representants define how statesmen and diplomats see the world, what they know about the world, and what they think they have to govern. Representants establish collective societal understandings. International order cannot exist without representants. When competing representants emerge, orders are in crisis. How political rule is represented – how rulers stage themselves in ceremonies, artifacts, diplomatic and warfare practices, and texts – explains the dynamics of international order: how political orders reproduce themselves and how they change.

Representants have four interrelated effects: First, they establish shared understandings of what kinds of entities exist in international politics, and what they look like. Second, by doing so they legitimize those international actors. Third, representants endow these actors with differential degrees of power. Fourth, representants are tools with the help of which those actors order and govern their relations. The international order changes if the representants change because the individuals acting in the international sphere will then see and know the world differently and they will have different tools at their disposal to order it.

In the High Middle Ages, there was in Europe a very hierarchical international order with the Pope and/or the Emperor at the top (Bosbach 1988). Specific representants, notably gothic cathedrals, Christian liturgy, and imperial ceremonial maintained this order. The coronation ritual played a special role. Thanks to the coronation, kings could distinguish themselves from other feudal lords (Reynolds 1997: 259–266). Simultaneously they required the pope and/or the emperor’s benediction to perform the act, which ensured the pope’s and the emperor’s position at the top of the hierarchy. With technological progress, and a monetization of the economy, travel increased, direct contact between rulers intensified, the material power basis of rulers grew, and the reach of their power extended. While the Pope and the Emperor sought to further enhance their standing, kings became increasingly less willing to accept papal and imperial superiority. Yet, kings still required the pope’s and/or the emperor’s benediction to distinguish themselves from other feudal lords. Kings sought to modify existing representants to rid themselves from papal and imperial superiority, but simultaneously maintain their position vis-
À-vis other lords. However, it was only with the advent of Protestantism that the European hierarchical order with pope and emperor at the top finally collapsed. Two processes were crucial in this regard. First, iconoclasm, the demolition of religious imagery, statues, and architecture, lead to the destruction of Catholic representatives that upheld the hierarchical order. Second, kings adapted and repurposed existing Catholic representatives for their own needs, to represent their own power, and thus established a territorially constrained hierarchical order with the king at the top. An order based on divine right absolutism emerged as a result of these struggles over representatives (Reus-Smit 1999).

Concomitantly to these developments, in the first half of the fifteenth century, the emergence of perspective in paintings led to numerous interconnected and largely unintentional changes in representatives, which in their accumulation brought about the conception of the territorial state as a bounded area inside which power is spread evenly over the entire territory. Geometry intertwined the effects of single-point perspective in painting (Edgerton 1975), Cartesian mapping (Branch 2014), fortification design (Langins 2004), practices of warfare, and garden and palace architecture (Mukerji 1997). The combined consequences in representatives generated the imagery of the territorial state.

The prevalent order in the early eighteenth century in Europe was then a hierarchical order between independent and territorial states. The Austrian emperor, the French king, and the Spanish king could ensure their high standing thanks to the prevailing representatives of diplomatic precedence and courtly ceremony that infiltrated even the army and military practices (Anderson 1988, 1993). Yet, several actors were asking for a more dominant role on the European stage—Great Britain, Prussia, and Russia. Statesmen in the European order considered these three powers inferior to France and Austria, despite the former's sustained efforts to establish a high position for themselves with the help of the dominant representatives. The three powers began to ridicule matters of diplomatic precedence to devalue this representative (Mori 2010; Wolf 1951). Simultaneously, they made full use of the emerging developments in the military realm, which allowed rulers to exert a higher degree of control over their armies (Anderson 1988). The territorial balance of power emerged as Europe's new ordering principle by the time of the Congress of Vienna (Holsti 1991).

The historical insights help with understanding the EU's governing arrangements. The EU is in a state of flux. Different actors support different ordering arrangements and struggles over representatives are related to these questions. For example, the European Parliament continues to develop new EU-level representatives that we know from the realm of domestic politics to increase its power and make the EU look more like a federal state. Thus it developed the Spitzenkandidaten-initiative, the idea that each party will have one Spitzenkandidat for the elections to the European Parliament, with the understanding that the Spitzenkandidat who wins the election will become the new President of the European Commission. The initiative occurred against the initial resistance of the Council (composed of member state representatives), and against the stipulations in the Lisbon Treaty (Traynor 2014). Yet, the European Parliament carried the day in 2014 and on the basis of these representative dynamics elected Jean-Claude Juncker as the President of the European Commission with a large majority. In 2019, however, the situation played out differently (Cloos 2019; Gray, Barigazzi, and De La Baume 2019). These are the kinds of ongoing struggles over representatives in the EU that will determine the EU's future shape.

References


Alena Drieschova joined the Kätte Hamburger Kolleg/ Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen in July 2020 and will be a Postdoc Research Fellow until June 2021.

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Remembering Elena Pulcini

Christine Unrau

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of our Alumni Fellow Elena Pulcini. Elena was a Professor of Social Philosophy at the University of Florence. Beyond her role as an academic, she was also a public intellectual, a member of the Italian Green Party, and one of the first signatories of the Convivialist Manifesto, a call for the reinvention of the art of living together in a way that combines community, individuality, and sustainability.

She spent her fellowship at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research in 2014. Her project was entitled A Passion for Giving and combined two important foci of her work, namely the social and political relevance of the passions and the theory of gift giving in the spirit of Marcel Mauss. Embracing the human passions, including love, indignation, and fear, without taking them as given or static, was at the centre of her philosophy. She saw it as a pivotal task of our time to ‘(re-)learn’ to fear, to transform our individual and collective anxieties into an ability to recognize our common vulnerability and, thereby, learn to care. The notion of mutual care also implies overcoming the modern illusion of autonomy, both of the individual and of the modern nation state, as pointed out, among many other works, in her monographs Care of the World: Fear, Responsibility and Justice in the Global Age (Springer 2013) and The Individual without Passions: Modern Individualism and the Loss of the Social Bond (Lexington 2012). Her most recent book-length publication, Tra Cura e Giustizia: Le Passioni come Risorsa Sociale (Bollati Boringhieri 2020), revisited the engagement with the passions, asking, ‘Why do we care for others even when we do not have any personal links with them? Why do we fight for justice even when we are not directly affected?’

As a social philosopher and a feminist scholar, Elena contributed a particular perspective to the Centre and brought it into a fruitful conversation with sociological and anthropological approaches to global cooperation research. Over the years, the exchange with researchers at the Centre and former fellows continued through mutual invitations to conferences, workshops and publications. Among other occasions, Elena returned to the Ruhr area for the Masterclass Gifts of Cooperation, a week-long event during which senior and junior researchers met at Zeche Zollverein world heritage site to discuss Marcel Mauss’s theory of the gift and its implications for global cooperation.

The ethics of care was not only pivotal for her research, but also at the heart of her teaching, mentoring and social commitment. It became palpable, above all, in her great capacity not only to diagnose and analyse, but also to listen and to encourage.
Centre’s New Fellows

Spring/Summer 2021

This list provides information about researchers who begin – or have begun – their fellowships at the Centre in the first half of 2021. Below, you will find each fellow’s project title, research group affiliation, and duration of stay. More details are provided in the Fellows section of our website. There you find extensive profiles including publications and curricula vitae.

Prof. Dr Rita Abrahamsen
The Global Networks of the New Right: The Case of South Africa
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Polycentric Governance Group
January 2021–June 2021

Prof. Michael C. Williams
The Radical Right and World Order
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
January 2021–June 2021

Dr. Karolina Kluzcewska
Conceptualising Competing Conceptions of World Order Through the Eyes of Aid Recipients?
Governance Models, Developmental Visions and Imaginaries of the Future in Central Asia: the Case of Post-Soviet Tajikistan
Postdoc Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
February 2021–January 2022

PD Dr Borbala Zsuzsanna Török
Critique of the Liberal State, Private Property and Legal Reform: Late 19th Century Experiences and Their Legacies
Senior Research Fellow in the Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Cooperation Group
March 2021–February 2022

Dr Ayşem Mert
Post-Corona Global Sustainability Cooperation: Imaginaries of new world orders
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
April 2021–March 2022

Prof. Dr Bidisha Biswas
The Global Refugee Regime: Contested Norms and Fragmented Cooperation
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
May 2021–April 2022

Dr Rene Urueña
This is the End: Apocalyptic Millenialism as Competing Conception of World Order in Latin America
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
May 2021–April 2022

Dr Layla Brown-Vincent
Return to the Source: The Dialectics of 21st Century Pan- African Liberation
Senior Research Fellow in the Global Cooperation and Diverse Conceptions of World Order Group
July 2021–June 2022

Dr Stanislav Budnitsky
Digital Nationalisms: National Imaginaries and the Construction of Internet Geopolitics
Postdoc Research Fellow in the Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Cooperation Group
July 2021–June 2022
Cybercrime Cases

- Online defamation is increasingly recognized as a social problem that official policymakers must address along with civil liberties. The perception of what constitutes defamation and what should be fought against is largely determined by the social understanding of the affected parties. Often comments are racist or sexist and target of defamatory campaigns. Defamation is thus a product, group, government, religion, or entire nation. Defamation is therefore largely about the social understanding of what constitutes defamation and what should be fought against.

Issues

- 2020
  - Cybercrime

- 2019
  - Migration, Utopie, Stadt

- 2018
  - Populism and Global Cooperation

- 2017
  - Online Defamation

https://www.gcr21.org/publications/briefings
## Upcoming Käte Hamburger Lectures

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<td>18</td>
<td>41st</td>
<td>If Democracy is the Answer, What is the Question?</td>
<td>Dale Jamieson (New York University)</td>
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<td>01</td>
<td>42nd</td>
<td>Social Justice Globally: The ILO Experience</td>
<td>Sandrine Kott (Université de Genève)</td>
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<td>43rd</td>
<td>Promoting Legitimacy in a Pluralist World Order through Creative Agency</td>
<td>Terry Macdonald (University of Melbourne)</td>
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<td>44th</td>
<td>Engineering Rules: ‘Good Governance’ According to Standards Movements since 1880</td>
<td>Craig Murphy (Wellesley College) and JoAnne Yates (MIT)</td>
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<td>Remembrance between Retrieval and Retro-projection</td>
<td>Aleida Assmann (Universität Konstanz, emer.)</td>
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<td>The Intersections of Extremism and Anti-feminism</td>
<td>Elizabeth Pearson (University of Swansea)</td>
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Access links for online events are provided after registration.

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For latest updates on our events, please see our website. You are invited to follow our livestreams and share your thoughts with our team on Twitter.
Quarterly Magazine: Stock

Global Cooperation Research - A Quarterly Magazine was established in 2019 as a platform for global cooperation research and related academic disciplines. ‘Pathways and mechanisms of global cooperation’ and ‘global cooperation and polycentric governance’ are current research areas of the Centre and provide prominent referential topics, as do the Centre’s policy fields: governance of climate change, governance of peacebuilding, migration governance, and internet governance. Other topics have been explored, including the current pandemic, populism, socio-political imaginaries, knowledge regimes, development cooperation, sociolinguistics, global health and cybersecurity, among others. Current fellows of the Centre regularly present their research. ‘The magazine wishes to fill a gap. Between a blog post and the peer reviewed journal articles, we provide a quality context for fresh topical explorations and outlines in a trending research field,’ says Martin Wolf, the magazine’s chief editor. ‘We welcome contributions from academics with an interest in a culture of open-minded, critically informed discussion.’

![Gender Balance Chart]

Contributions to the Magazine

Evaluation of the first two years (excluding the current year)
Meeting on the second anniversary of the Paris Agreement signing in 2017, the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat founded the Climate Chain Coalition (CCC). Backed by a number of multi-stakeholder groups like the Blockchain for Climate Foundation, the Ottawa-based CCC promotes the ‘blockchainization’ of the Paris Agreement. What kind of ‘cooler’ world do blockchain-based climate governance projects conjure? This paper scrutinizes the shared visions materializing across climate finance experiments, locating them largely within existing individualistic imaginaries rather than more collectivistic alternatives. It finds the imaginaries of ‘cool’ technological experimentation to fall short in materializing broader input and more effective output required to overcome the legitimacy crisis facing market-led climate governance.

Forthcoming (May 2021)
Research Papers by Umberto Mario Sconfienza and Malcolm Campbell-Verduyn and Elena Drieschova
Reviews


Power and Authority in Internet Governance investigates the hotly contested role of the state in today’s digital society. The book cautions an all too easy juxtaposition of authoritarian vs. democratic state governance. This, as the editors stress in their introductory remarks, draws attention away from what they see as some important underlying dynamics. Based on a workshop, organized by the Centre’s first internet fellows Blayne Haggart and Natasha Tusikova together with Co-Director Jan Aart Scholte, the contributions, in particular those on China (Lianrui Jia, Ting Luo, Aofei Lv) and Russia (Ilona Stadnik), contain a degree of detailed empirical analysis of authoritarian states that is uncommon in English-language texts. The editors are to be applauded for achieving ‘a more nuanced account of authoritarian states in internet governance’ (251) than typically found in the literature. The volume begins with a bird’s eye view of the typology of internet governance (Mauro Santanello), the role of states at ICANN (Olga Cavalli and Jan Aart Scholte), value competition in a single regime complex (Niels ten Oever) and the changing role of the state in an emerging data-driven economy (Dan Ciuriak and Maria Ptashkina); it then scrutinizes internet governance in authoritarian and democratic states. Of interest to readers will be a comparison of these depictions of the state of the art in China and Russia with those in Brazil (Jhessica Reia, Luã Fergus Cruz), Latin America broadly (Jean-Marie Chenou), and the EU (Julia Rone). It seems that institutional and historical contexts contribute much to a possible explanation of differences in approaches and perceived regulatory needs. The role of civil society involvement is an underlying theme in almost all contributions because it has been instrumental in spreading digital culture and ‘literacy’ in many countries. Civil society feels sidelined, however, in many contemporary scenarios. Smart cities in Brazil seem to provide a case study on this particular issue (Jhessica Reia, Luã Fergus Cruz). The real opposition is not simply between democratic and authoritarian states, but between those conceptions of government that are directed toward serving the common and those that are not; the opposition is not contingent on particular political underpinnings. Global capitalism is depicted as antagonistic to ideas of public interest. In the end, the editors indicate sympathy with ‘a carefully crafted return of the state in internet governance’.


Guest edited by scholars related to the Centre with contributions from associated fellows, this special issue of Third World Quarterly—result of an endeavor that once started with an author’s workshop at the Centre in 2019—provides a survey of current research on global migration governance. The volume seeks to contribute to an understanding of the complexities of migration governance from the local level to the global. It discusses recent developments in global migration governance, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Pécoud), and aims to provide insights into whether migration can be merely ‘managed’ by states, as an increasing number of non-state actors shape international migration flows. A basic reference of this special issue is the work of Ronaldo Munck with whom the editors share the uneasy belief that as long as structural inequalities prevail, the concept of ‘Global South’ vs. ‘Global North’ has to be continued. Almost all contributing authors share local/regional expertise and contribute challenging question from the ground: migration caravans and temporary migration visas in Mexico (Marchand), a responsibility gap in host countries like Lebanon around the repatriation of refugees from Syria (Fakhoury), civic activism of formal and informal refugee-led Syrian community organizations in Turkey (Mencutek), the criminalization of migrant rescue in the Saharan, in the Mediterranean and across Europe (Ben-Arieh and Heins). The securitization of migrants using digital tools is ubiquitous, but how these data are shared – or not – is quite peculiar (Glouftsiotis and Scheel). Spheres of power and influence do exist between states, and between states and non-state actors, but also between IOMs. The uneasy coordination between IOM and UNHCR in the Asia-Pacific region provides a current case (Moretti). Regional architectures are prominent in this special issue, spanning the Asia-Pacific, Africa, NAFTA and the EU. This contributes to the impression that a sharp eye on local specificities is well combined in this special issue with an awareness and lucid reflections about the obstacles to better cooperation for good governance (beware: the dark side cooperates as well).

Reviews: Martin Wolf
What follows is a list of new publications of the Centre’s current and former fellows and staff as well as authors from our wider academic network. We publish an updated list and invite you to inform us about your recent contributions to the field of global cooperation research. The published list represents a selection of titles that we feel are substantive contributions to the field.


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