

Borders and the State in Light of COVID-19

Call for Submissions: A discussion assembled by the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies and Security in Context

The closing down of borders to international travel has been one of the most dramatic transformations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Pew Research Center, by early April 2020, 7.1 billion people or over 90% of the global population live in countries with restrictions on non-citizen entry, and of those around 3 billion live in countries completely closed to noncitizens or nonresidents. In the last few decades and driven by global capitalism, securitization of borders was employed by states to project their ability to protect identities, culture and societies, while lifting barriers to the unfettered flow of capital and failing to invest sufficiently in public and socially useful infrastructure. Wendy Brown argues that states have resorted to borders and walls in order to project a stark and theatrical image of 'failing' state sovereignty (Brown 2010).

Critical scholars of borders have advanced our understanding of borders in several other ways. First, since the rise of the modern nation-state, borders are not and have never been simple fixed lines that separate states but are better understood as zones whose role is contested and constantly being re-constituted, or in the words of Mark Salter (2012), "borders are given meaning through practice". Second, the border is not just 'out there' and far away from the core issues or only relevant for those trying to traverse them such as workers, migrants, or refugees. Rather borders as peripheral areas are also important to understanding the dynamics of the core. In other words, studying borders tells us not just about border regions, but also the central states, and more broadly the entire international system. In that sense they also inform us on struggles along gender, class, race, ethnic, status dimensions alongside citizenship lines (Özgen 2008). Third, studying border regions can help us rethink, critique and counter dominant narratives or commonsense understandings of 'state failure', 'weakness' or 'absence' so prevalent particularly in the study of developing country borders (Mouawad 2018; Mouawad and Baumann 2017).

In this roundtable, we invite critical scholars of borders to reflect on the question of borders in light of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic response. Some questions our authors will reflect on include:

- How can historical and critical readings of borders help us understand the current moment?

- In what ways does your own research help us understand the importance of borders to understanding broader political, economic, or sociological processes or questions?
- What does the shutting down of borders imply for millions of workers, migrants and refugees who rely on border crossings for their survival?
- Can this moment be an opportunity for a paradigm shift in our understanding of related issues such as the state, international capital, as well as global solidarity and the struggle for justice?

Please send submissions of about 2,000-2,500 word articles in English or Arabic to admin@securityincontext.com by August 15th, 2020. The submissions will be reviewed for publication by the project team. Authors of papers selected for publication will receive a modest honorarium.

For any questions or clarifications, please contact: admin@securityincontext.com

Works cited:

Brown, W. (2010). *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. MIT Press: Cambridge.

Mouawad, J. (2018). Lebanon's Wadi Khaled on the Border with Syria: Economic Transformations in Times of Peace and War. *Critique Internationale*, (3), 67-88.

Mouawad, J., & Baumann, H. (2017). Wayn al-Dawla? Locating the Lebanese State in Social Theory. *Arab Studies Journal*, 25(1), 66-90.

Özgen, H. N. (2008). The Ideology of Selective Forgetting: How a Political Massacre Is Remembered in Turkey: the '33 Bullets Incident'.

Salter, M. B. (2012). Theory of the: The Suture and Critical Border Studies. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), 734-755.