The politics of teaching international relations in the Arab world

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DOI:
10.1093/isp/ekaa020

Special Forum

The Politics of Teaching International Relations in the Arab World:

Reading Walt in Beirut, Wendt in Doha, and Abul-Fadl in Cairo

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Asbtract:

Can International Relations (IR) as it is taught in the Arab world be said to be an "American social science" or is it taught differently in different places? The forum addresses this question through an exploration of what and how scholars at Arab universities are teaching IR and how institutional, historical and linguistic as well as political and individual factors shape classroom dynamics in the Arab world. This forum attempts to bring the classroom into the Global/Post-Western debate by showing how IR can be taught differently in different places with a focus on a region under-represented in IR debates: the Arab world. The essays, exhibiting diversity in pedagogical strategies and theoretical perspectives, provide a window into how the 'international' is perceived and taught locally by teachers and students in various Arab contexts. While the influence from the American "core" of the discipline is obvious, the forum documents how the theoretical and conceptual foundations of IR based on Western perspectives and history do not travel intact. The essays collectively provide evidence of different kinds of IRs not just across but also within regions and show that studying pedagogy can become a way to study how disciplinary IR varies contextually.

Keywords: international relations, teaching, pedagogy, Arab World, Global/Post-Western IR

The Politics and Pedagogy of Teaching IR in the Arab World: An Introduction

May Darwich, Morten Valbjørn, and Bassel F. Salloukh

Can International Relations (IR) as it is taught in the Arab world be said to be an "American social science" or is it taught differently in different places? The forum addresses this question through an exploration of what and how scholars at Arab universities are teaching IR and how institutional, historical and linguistic as well as political and individual factors shape classroom dynamics in the Arab world. The forum demonstrates how pedagogical strategies in Arab classrooms provide an excellent window into how international relations practices are understood in Arab contexts and shows that studying pedagogy can become a way to study how disciplinary IR varies contextually.

Globalizing IR

The forum takes its point of departure from Cox's (1981) famous remark that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose…(there) is no such thing as theory in itself divorced from a standpoint in time and space." This insight is combined with Hoffmann's (1977) statement about how IR traditionally has been an "American Social Science" and Wæver's (1998) counterclaim that "IR might be quite different in different places." In this way, the forum engages the current debate on Global/Post-Western IR (Shani 2008; Tickner and Wæver 2009; Archarya 2014), which reflects an increasing awareness within the field of IR that contemporary political challenges cannot be understood through a purely Western perspective. This debate on Global/Post-Western IR has various expressions: some have highlighted how (Western) IR traditionally has been blind not only to the diversity of the various forms of behavior, dynamics, and actors in international relations, but also to its own limited perspective (Valbjørn 2008). Others have explored whether and how IR is imagined and studied in substantially different ways in other parts of the world by mapping IR with Chinese/Latin-American/Indian/African/European characteristics (e.g., Tickner 2003; Jørgensen and Knudsen

2006; Smith 2009; Qin 2009; Shahi and Ascione 2016). Still others have asked how the "non-West" can become a "producer of knowledge" rather than being only an "object of knowledge" to enrich our understanding of the international (Hellmann and Valbjørn 2017; Gelardi 2019) but also to escape dependence on what Mignolo (2002, 80) has labelled "the epistemology of North Atlantic modernity."

Is teaching IR different in different places?

So far, IR may still be far away from being a truly global community of scholars with "reasonably symmetrical flows of communication, with 'exporters' of knowledge also being 'importers' from other sources" as Holsti (1985, 13) once described his "ideal model of a community of scholars." That said, the various efforts at "globalizing IR" (Peters and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2016) have contributed to making IR scholarship more reflexive and brought attention to regional and national differences in knowledge production.

As Hagmann and Biersteker (2014) notice, inquiries into the political and intellectual tendencies of the discipline tend to treat scholars as the sole audience of IR politics, and analyses of journal publication patterns stand out as the single most important measure for assessing scholarly communities. Far less attention has been paid to how national and regional differences are reflected in the way IR is *taught* and what dynamics in the classroom tell about how the international is perceived and practiced in different places. Similarly, issues from the Global/Post-Western IR debate have barely entered the classrooms. According to Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. (2020, 24), the "best IR programs'" syllabi remain U.S.-centered, and the leading textbooks are written by authors of Western background and seldom problematize the discipline's geo-epistemological biases or draw on non-Western perspectives.

There are, however, several reasons, why the realm of teaching deserves a more prominent place in the debate on Global/Post-Western IR. *First*, it can provide a more nuanced picture of the state of IR as an academic field. Based on a survey of IR curricula at American and European universities, Hagmann and Biersteker (2014, 306), for instance, show how publication patterns do not match teaching practices. Analysis of leading journals suggests that European IR is much

more open to reflexive frameworks than it actually is in teaching. *Second*, compared to academic flagship publications with a limited readership, IR courses speak to a much larger audience as they socialize not only future members of the scholarly community but also policy-makers and others who strive to engage in international relations practically. It will also direct focus to the role of human agency, i.e. teachers, who, in their own teaching, socialize students to their chosen forms of knowledge and worldviews. A *third* reason for introducing the classrooms to the Global/Post-Western IR debate is provided by Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. (2020, 17). Based on their own experiences from a graduate seminar on "Locating the 'I' in IR", they point to how "university classes constitute an important social space to initiate changes in theory production" as it – when successful – can create "a student-lecturer synergy, characterized by mutual learning." By broadening the debate about the sociology of IR by including the classrooms, the discussion brings an additional dimension to the existing debate on how many IR core assumptions are deeply embedded in a Western intellectual tradition and closely connected to specific challenges in European history. Against this background, it is natural that students (in the Global South) experience a disconnect between the theories and their own lived reality, aspirations, and experiences. This disconnect invites a rethinking of the teaching of IR both in terms of *what* is taught, i.e. the curricula, and *how* it is taught, e.g., "de-centering" and "contrapuntal readings" as suggested by Tickner and Smith (2020, 8).

A belated arrival…the Arab world in the Global/Post-Western IR debate

To the (limited) extent the realm of teaching has received attention in the Global/Post-Western IR debate, most focus has been directed to how IR is taught at American or European universities (for an exception, Tickner and Smith 2020). However, if "IR is taught differently in different places" as Hagmann and Biersteker (2014, 305) — paraphrasing Wæver — suggest, it is natural also to look "beyond the West." This forum does so by turning to one of the places, where the Global/Post-Western IR debate have received the least attention: the Arab world.

In their effort to gather IR scholars from around the world, Tickner and Wæver (2009, 173) faced the difficulty of soliciting a chapter on IR in the Arab world noting that "during the – long – process of recruiting expert authors for all of the chapters (…), the Arab case stood out as the

most challenging. Relatively little has been published on IR in the Arab countries compared to some of the other regions (…) and more potential authors were contacted for this chapter than for any other." While self-reflexive scholarship from Turkey, Iran and Israel have been relatively more visible within the IR literature (e.g. Moshirzadeh 2009; Lupovici 2014; Bilgin 2017; Aydınlı, E., et al. 2018), the Arab world remains particularly under-represented. Thus, questions about how IR have been studied within the Arab region have seldom been addressed, just as theoretical contributions to broader IR debates based on insights from the Arab world have been rare (among the exceptions Korany 1986, 2009; Makdisi 2009; Salloukh 2017). There are burgeoning signs of how this is changing, however.

In addition to the recently published manifesto for a "Beirut School of critical security studies" (Abboud et al. 2018, Hazbun et al. 2019), recent workshops have brought leading figures from "Global IR" together with scholars based in the Arab world. Some of these have reflected on promises and pitfalls of homegrown theorizing and how (Western) theories and concepts are used in different contexts (Salloukh 2017; Hazbun and Valbjørn 2018). Others have further produced self-reflective autobiographies of how personal experiences, institutional contexts, geo-cultural locations, disciplinary training and the encounter of specific influential persons/books have shaped people's own intellectual journey as IR scholars (Valbjørn and Hazbun 2017).

Like in the broader debate, this recent trend has focused on *scholars* and the *theorizing* of international relations in/on/from the Arab world. Less attention has been given to whether the same dynamics are present in classroom pedagogy and whether IR is *taught* differently in the Arab world (as an exception, Burns 2014). Thus, we still know little about what kind of textbooks and articles are used and how courses are organized in terms of topics, theories, methods, and cases in the Arab world. When it comes to the receiving end, i.e. the students, we know even less. Even if syllabi for IR courses at Arab universities happen to be very similar to what is found at American and European universities, the dynamics in the class might be different in terms of topics, texts, theories, methods, and classroom interactions. Thus, in the general Global IR debate focus has in recent years evolved from a search for "radically different

indigenous non-Western theories" (of which there are quite few) to a growing attention to how the same (Western) theories and concepts travel but are sometimes used differently in different contexts (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2020, 23). Following Bilgin (2008, 6), it is, therefore important to develop an awareness of what is "almost the same, but not quite."

To understand how IR is taught at universities in the Arab world, it is important not only to focus on similarities/differences between Arab and European/American universities, but also to be attentive to variations within the Arab world. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the individual level, e.g. students and teachers, and their backgrounds and training (Abboud 2015; Neumann and Neumann 2018), but also to situate the teaching in its larger contexts. One of these is the academic institutional context, i.e. the university (Grenier and Hagmann 2016). The Arab world is marked by a multiplicity of university models. In addition to public universities, there are various kinds of private universities, some of which are more prestigious than the public and others are not. In addition to national universities, there are also various American/British/French-modelled universities, some of which are "branch universities," e.g. Georgetown University in Qatar, and others are more like the American University in Cairo (Kleypas and McDougall 2011). In addition to considering these institutional variances, another relevant context concerns the broader social, political and cultural settings, within which the teaching takes place. Teaching and studying IR in the Arab world are often perceived as a political or ideological activity of some sort, where teachers navigate exceptionally politicized classrooms, and where regional conflicts, identity politics, history, and authoritarianism may shape the type of IR taught.

Inside the IR classrooms in the Arab world

In order to explore how IR is taught in the Arab world and how knowledge production is intertwined with pedagogy, this forum presents seven essays by scholars with a shared experience in studying and teaching IR in the region. However, they differ in terms of their regional geographical locations, institutional affiliations, teaching experiences in different kinds of (Arab world and non-Arab world) contexts, and theoretical backgrounds. All essays do in various ways reflect on three broad issues based on experiences from the Arab classroom.

The *first* of these revolves around what and how we teach IR in the Arab world and the knowledge shaping the curriculum. The forum provides evidence of how teaching in the region remains influenced by the American predominance in the discipline. While scholars teaching IR in the Arab world have appreciation for mainstream theoretical approaches, the forum does at the same time demonstrate how scholars are increasingly grappling with pedagogical dilemmas to meet the understandings and experiences of their students. IR theories do not travel seamless across borders, and IR is therefore taught differently in different places — even *within* the Arab world. Some make the case that mainstream IR approaches remains the foundation to teaching international relations in the Arab world and remains a first step for making a contribution to knowledge production. Salloukh, for instance, argues that engaging with American IR from an Arab world perspective is the prime route for adapting the discipline to the realities surrounding the classroom in the region. Others encourage their students to read IR texts "against the grain." Hazbun explains how teaching IR in Beirut necessitated the cultivation of critical and postcolonial perspectives in the classroom to allow students to reflect on the politics of knowledge production that defined the development of IR theories around security interests of the US and Western images of the Middle East. Despite important gaps in local/Arab knowledge production within IR, still others are looking for theoretical approaches emerging from the region as an alternative to Western-based theories that do not fit the reality in the region. Abou Samra reflects on the experience of teaching an Islamic paradigm of IR at Cairo University and discusses the opportunities and challenges of teaching a non-Western homegrown IR theory that provides students with a view on international relations deriving from the region, its historical heritage, and its contemporary political challenges. As discussed in Makdisi's essay, the choices of textbooks and material chosen for the syllabus are also shaped by the needs of the students and the "live" events surrounding them in the region.

A *second* set of issues in this forum pertains to how various kinds of contexts — be it institutional, historical, cultural and/or linguistic — influence and shape classroom dynamics when teaching IR in the Arab world. Institutional structures, including varying degrees of subsidizing higher education, means a very high student-staff ratio in public universities (Albloshi's essay) — as opposed to American (and private) universities where teachers have

more resources with smaller cohorts in the classroom. Different colonial and postcolonial histories also have an impact on the institutional context in which the teaching takes place. While IR in part of the region may resemble "an American social science", e.g. some of the "branch universities" in the Gulf, this is far from the case in the Maghreb. As a legacy of the French colonial era, the teaching of IR at Moroccan universities, for example, is placed in law departments and characterized by an over-reliance on descriptive and normative approaches fashionable in legal studies, as well as on French IR textbooks without much engagement with textbooks in English or even foundational work from the region (Saddiki's essay). The language of teaching adds another layer of complexity. While some universities teach in English or French, students' mastery of these languages is limited in the Arab world. At many universities, the language of teaching at undergraduate/masters levels is therefore Arabic (Bamyeh 2015, 30). Saouli examines the opportunities and challenges of teaching IR in Arabic at a private institute in the Gulf (the Doha Institute) with graduate students from all over the Arab world. As also discussed in Albloshi's essay, the difficulties of finding sources in Arabic adds to the challenges of engaging students with mainstream IR theories.

A *third* set of issues revolves around a range of individual and political factors that shape teaching IR in the Arab world. Although the relative importance of individual factors are often conditions by the institutional and broader societal context, teaching IR is also subject to the scholars' own education, training, experience, and identity (Kreber 2010; Neumann and Neumann 2018). For example, scholars coming from interdisciplinary backgrounds embrace various theoretical approaches beyond mainstream IR theories in their teaching (Makdisi in this forum). Whether trained in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, or the Arab world also has an impact on how scholars decide on the curriculum and the preferred teaching style. IR scholars in the Arab world who have graduated from Western Universities are more likely to be equivalent in training and education to their European or American counterparts, yet their ambition to teach IR in the classroom often collides against political and societal constraints (Albloshi's essay). In addition to the institutional context, teaching practices are inextricably connected to local, national, and regional events. The lack of academic freedom and freedom of expression in parts of the Arab world means that the authorities can put restrictions on the

material taught in the classroom (Albloshi's essay). Both teacher and students, living in the Arab world, are moreover grappling with the everyday politics of the region and the sense of insecurity and resistance. These shared experiences and struggles sometimes drive scholars toward embracing and teaching critical IR approaches in the classroom that resonate with their daily lives and enable both students and teachers to regain their sense of agency. Albloshi explores how international politics defines the boundaries of critical inquiry in the classroom in Kuwait. Gulf state identities, its international relations, and the vulnerability of its ruling elites often directly and indirectly shape how IR is taught. Makdisi presents pedagogical reflections on how to address the tension evolving from the necessity of teaching Western IR theories, that define the discipline, while complementing it with critical ways of thinking that resonate with students' everyday lives and insecurities in the Arab world.

In conclusion, IR as it is taught in the Arab world cannot be said to be an "American social science" as such. While the influence from the "core" of the discipline is obvious, the theoretical and conceptual foundations of IR based on Western perspectives and history do not travel intact. Instead, they are adapted, challenged, critiqued, and/or replaced by alternative homegrown perspectives in the very different Arab classrooms. Despite vibrant debates within IR contemplating the various ways in which the discipline can be enriched by engaging non-Western perspectives in scholarly understanding of the international, teaching has hitherto received less attention. This forum attempts to bring the classroom into debates on Global/Post-Western by showing how IR can be taught differently but creatively in different areas of the world. The essays in this forum, exhibiting diversity in pedagogical strategies and theoretical perspectives, provide a window into how the 'international' is taught and perceived locally by teachers and students in various Arab contexts. They collectively provide evidence of different kinds of IRs not just across but also within regions.

1. The American Maharajah and the Arab Foot-Students: Studying International Relations *from* the Arab World

Bassel F. Salloukh

This forum raises an important epistemological and pedagogical challenge by problematizing how International Relations (IR) is taught in the Arab world and for what purposes. Valbjørn (2020, 262) captures this challenge elegantly when he enquires about "which kinds of strategies are more likely to make IR theory genuinely international, not only as regards what is studied but also when it comes to how and by whom; i.e. how can the 'non-West' to a larger extent become a 'producer of knowledge' rather than being only an 'object of knowledge,' and how can insights from different places be connected in a genuinely international debate?" This essay takes up the pedagogical dimension of this challenge, namely the connection between how we teach IR in the Arab world and prospects for genuine IR knowledge-production from the Arab world.

As a graduate of the Montréal School of Middle East IR (Korany, Noble, and Brynen 1993; Salloukh and Brynen 2004) who taught IR in the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, now teaching it at the Lebanese American University in Lebanon, I have always been conscious of the need to ensure that graduate seminars provide students a rigorous survey of a range of theoretical, methodological, and thematic debates in mainstream classical American IR, but also of the need to demonstrate how the study of IR from the Arab world can feed into mainstream theoretical debates. This pedagogical objective is organically connected to a critique of power immanent in IR disciplinary hierarchies and discourses. That the North American discipline and discourse of IR is a project deeply implicated with power and imperialism is unquestionable (Cox 1981; Tully 1993; Said 1994; Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Vitalis 2015). After all, to paraphrase Khalidi (1991, 5), IR theory looks very different from the standpoint of the American Maharajah on the elephant than to the foot-students of IR walking behind in the Global South.

What then is the impact of how we teach IR in the Arab world on prospects for knowledge-production from the region? And how can this difficult task contribute to making the discipline genuinely international? In the balance of this essay I argue that we cannot challenge IR's parochialism, let alone imperialism, and the historical contingency of much of its core concepts, without fully appreciating its mainstream theoretical and methodological assumptions. Moreover, the Arab world cannot participate in IR knowledge-production without the requisite theoretical and methodological training in American IR. After all, most IR research produced in the Arab world lacks methodological rigor and is consequently absent from major scholarly outlets and hence theoretical debates.

The necessary first step in this process must be to start with IR *as* "an American social science" (Hoffmann 1977) and *as* it sees itself: a set of coherent, parsimonious, though not inflexible, prepositions and predictions about the behavior of great powers. Neo-realism remains the most rigorous theory of this type of "American social science" IR. This is why it is important to start by teaching neorealism, to set it up as an elegant theoretical statement about how states behave in an anarchic international or regional order, to unpack the assumptions it makes about the nature and role of the state in IR, the role of sovereignty, alliances, and material power. It is also important to introduce students to neorealism's various challenges from within the disciplinary core, whether they come from different levels of analysis, such as the domestic and the idiosyncratic levels, or non-material perspectives, namely constructivism and post-structuralism (Ashley 1994; Wendt 1999).

Introducing students in the Arab World to an American IR also entails training them to think the way IR students in North America think of IR: to zero-in on the causal argument in the readings, to identify independent and dependent variables, to see things from different levels of analysis, to measure both the material and immaterial capabilities of states, and to situate readings in theoretical dialogue with other readings. As the contributions to this forum suggest, students in the Arab world struggle with this positivist approach to IR because they may not possess proper methodological skills. But this approach remains rewarding because it serves as the best antidote to a conspiracy theory worldview so popular in the Arab world (Burns 2014), and one

constantly reproduced by regimes, political elites, and media outlets. A number of examples suffice to demonstrate this point.

What is more rewarding for students of IR *in* the Arab world: to think of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq as part of a long list of foreign conspiracies against regional aspirants, or as part of the complex aftereffects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a US foreign policy decision rooted in a mix of ideational, domestic, and material causes (Dodge 2006; Hinnebusch 2007; Gause 2009)? Similarly, what better explains the 2006 Lebanon War between Hizbullah and Israel: a premeditated conspiracy by Washington and Tel Aviv to eradicate the former, or the failure of deterrence between the two antagonists as predicted by rational deterrence theory (Sobelman 2016/17). Finally, is Iranian foreign policy in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen best explained by reference to millenarian conspiracy theories rooted in Shi'a identity, or the defensive realist calculations of a regional actor with limited military capabilities (Juneau 2016; Ahmadian and Mohseni 2019)? Of course, this is not to argue that the region has not been subjected to foreign interventions, military or otherwise, in pursuit of hegemonic economic and political interests, far from it. Rather, that secular criticism (Said 1983) of the workings of the international system using the tools of a Western IR are much more rewarding than conspiracy pastimes.

We cannot engage IR from an Arab world perspective, then, without possessing a solid appreciation of its theories and methodologies, even though these, and to borrow from Edward Said (1979), are often produced *in* the West and *for* the West. But this pedagogical first step is nothing more than a necessary prerequisite for teaching them critically, for opening them up to new interpretations and discoveries, for interrogating their basic assumptions, as Hazbun, Saouli and Makdisi show in this special forum. Of course, to speak of an IR from an Arab world perspective does not mean that there is something essentially *Arab* about this kind of IR. Rather, that teaching IR should be done in full cognizance of the contextual nuances to which theories should adapt when traveling (Said 1983) across different regions with different but interconnected histories and audiences. These nuances may pertain to how the region's international relations are shaped by different processes of state and class formations, different patterns of state/regime-society relations, different temporalities in the region's insertion into

global capitalist structures, conceptions of security and sovereignty, and the assumptions we make about state autonomy and rational actors, all of which are a consequence not of cultural exceptionalisms but rather different historical, institutional, and political economic trajectories (Halliday 2005; Hinnebusch 2015).

Little wonder that some of the best insights generated by an IR from the Arab world are produced through rigorous engagements with the limitations – but also breadth – of IR's core theoretical assumptions, as ably demonstrated a long time ago by Korany (1986). This includes, but is not limited to, theorizing alternative understandings of state and societal security and insecurity, one that "recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the security environment composed of diverse state, non-state, and transnational actors that serve as agents of both security and insecurity" (Hazbun 2017, 656), demystifying the imperial discourse embedded in UN resolutions and the "war on terror" narratives and their impacts on the domestic politics of countries in the region (Makdisi 2011), contesting the limitations of what is often a binary epistemology (weak/strong, rational/irrational, state/non-state, stability/instability) embedded in much of mainstream IR theorizing (Abboud et al., 2018), interrogating the impact of coercive approaches to non-conventional arms control on international security (Hindawi 2011), and, as Abou Samra shows in her contribution to this forum, surveying variable alternative Islamist conceptualizations of IR (Baroudi 2016).

Collectively, these critical excursions demonstrate that the Arab world can be a producer of IR knowledge as long as we create a new generation of scholars from the Arab world trained in the right pedagogical strategies. Perhaps then voices from the region can also contribute to the kind of "big thinking" (Walt 2011) on international affairs that shapes policies made in the discipline's ground zero – policies that have often had injurious political, economic, and security implications on the states and peoples of the Arab world. All this may ultimately help bring down the Maharajah of American IR from its pedestal and, along with similar efforts across other parts of the world, contribute to refashioning the discipline into a truly "Global IR" (Acharya 2014).

2. Cultivating "Good Pirates": Teaching Critical IR and How to Read Against the Grain

Waleed Hazbun

To the degree that international relations remains a US-centered field, teaching IR in the Global South, especially in the Arab world, requires the cultivation of critical and postcolonial perspectives. Teaching widely read IR theories can offer students valuable tools, but these texts are often framed in terms of the security interests of the US and its allies and offer distorted images of the Middle East. Critical and postcolonial perspectives allow students to understand the enduring impact of colonialism and empire in the hierarchical structuring of the global system, the sources of insecurity faced by societies in the Arab region, and the politics of knowledge production that has defined the development of rival theories and perspectives in IR.

Classrooms in Beirut — where I taught for many years —, Cairo, Doha, and elsewhere in the region, consist of students and instructors with diverse experiences and insights that offer multiple perspectives and allow students to develop critical takes on IR theories and texts. While students should become versed in the global language of IR, they also need to learn to speak and write in a dialect that resonates with their own experiences and goals.

Learning to read "against the grain"

In US and European IR textbooks and scholarship, the basic structures of international relations and global order are those defined by the great powers of Europe and the United States. The narrative of IR they present often begins in 1945 with the American vision for a US-centered global order and the challenges the US and its allies faced. Colonialism, empire, and racial hierarchy might be discussed as historical concepts rather than the frameworks that gave rise to and still dominate the language and structures of international relations as field of knowledge (Hobson 2012; Vitalis 2015).

Rather than depending on such often prohibitively expensive textbooks (which students usually access through photocopies or pirated e-books), my former IR colleagues at the American

University of Beirut (AUB) and I argue that our teaching in Beirut should address "local understandings of insecurity that recognize the destabilizing impact of recent US policy, and in which local actors might play a meaningful role in shaping practices of global governance" (Hazbun, Makdisi, and Hindawi 2019, 11). Following this approach, teaching IR requires that students be taught in a nonlinear fashion. They have to learn how to read texts, as advocated by subaltern studies, "against the grain" and develop their own understanding of IR by assembling a diverse range of narratives, theories, critiques, and insights.

The postcolonial insights in the classroom

For Siba N. Grovogui, a leading scholar of postcolonial IR, the cultivation of a postcolonial approach begins by highlighting how IR knowledge was developed from the vantage point and for the purpose of colonial administration. For example, Grovogui (2013, 260) notes that "most accounts of the Suez crisis tell a story of a superpower balance of power, uneasy Cold War alliances, and the supposed recklessness of Third World nationalism." In contrast, many students in postcolonial contexts are likely to view the 1956 Suez war as an aggressive act by Israel, France, and Britain seeking to punish Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser for the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The nationalization resonated beyond Egypt as it offered an example for postcolonial states who sought to reclaim their economic resources for national development and forge an international order based on common norms of sovereignty.

Today, most US textbooks and IR scholarship view the 2003 US-led invasion Iraq in much the same way. Even when they offer critiques of US policy, they frame the event within the shadow of 9/11, the fear of mass casualty terrorism, and the debate about the unipolar moment (see, for example, Baylis, Smith, and Owen 2014, 75; Hook and Spanier 2019, 282-290). They might note that many Americas have come to view the war as a mistake, but view the action in exceptionalist terms, blaming the policy on faulty intelligence, domestic political influence, and/or ideological approach of the Bush administration. In contrast, many students and scholars in Beirut and elsewhere consider the 2003 war as an act of aggression and might compare US actions to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon or the 1956 Suez War. In each case, students must understand the strategic logic of the policy,

including the perceived threats and expected goals, but also how each violates global norms, international law, and the sovereignty and security of Arab states. More critically, the implication of the US invasion of Iraq for mainstream IR should be viewed in terms of the impact of the end of the cold war. So many IR theories at the time lacked tools to explain these events. But viewed from the Global South and through theories of critical and postcolonial IR, post 9/11 US policy has reflected the hierarchical structure of the global system and the imperial patterns of US foreign policy since its founding.

In the absence of textbooks that decenter the experience of Europe and the US, teaching IR requires offering an alternative genealogy of insecurity rooted in experiences of colonialism and empire. In the case of the Middle East, Niva (1999) shows how various Arab nationalist and Islamist discourses, developed by both state and non-state actors, identify threats ranging from economic exploitation and the territorial divisions and forms of government imposed by the colonial mandate system to the local adoption of secular forms of nationalism and education.

In a related effort, Bilgin (2019) maps alternative constructions of regional security in the Middle East. She highlights "top-down" visions developed to serve external interests as well as conceptions developed "bottom-up" such as expressed by popular movements during the Arab Uprisings. As Bilgin (2017, 654) argues there is a pressing need for more scholarship focused on the "insecurities experienced by various state and non-state actors in the Arab world, as well as the military, economic, and societal dimensions of insecurity."

Reading American IR against the grain

Students also need to become broadly versed in the language and theories of IR but must learn how to read these texts against the grain. One of the few commonly taught IR texts that draws on Middle East cases to develop IR theory is Walt's (1987) *The Origins of Alliances.* Walt's neorealist concept of the balance of threat, and his observation that balancing against a threat is more common than bandwagoning with it, offer useful insight into the geopolitical rivalry between similarly ideologically aligned Arab nationalist republics. But when taught in places like Beirut where an active conflict with Israel is still felt, Walt suggests the wrong lessons about

regional alliance formation. The most consequential alliance has been the Egyptian bandwagon with Israel and the US initiated by the 1978 Camp David Accords (Walt 1987, 177-8). This alliance restructured regional geopolitics but was shaped in large part due to the political economy of Egypt and its relationship to global economic processes (Hinnebusch 2002, 95-7). Read against the grain, Walt's *The Origins of Alliances* suggests the highly destabilizing influences of the expanding US role in the Middle East and global neoliberalism as they disrupt regional equilibrium balancing mechanisms.

Even more striking insights into global politics can be produced by reading Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" against the grain. While much of the critical debate about Huntington's text focused on its highly problematic depiction of global civilizations and culture, Hazbun (2013) suggests the text can be more usefully read in terms of how it expresses anxiety about the rising power and agency of non-Western states. Most IR scholarship fails to recognize the agency of non-Western states and their interest in a voice in the shaping the nature of global order. While Huntington is an advocate of US primacy, he notes that "the peoples and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history" (Huntington 1993, 23). At the same time, Huntington (1993, 40) recognizes that "The West in effect is using international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in ways that maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests and promote Western political and economic values." As Hazbun (2013, 223) suggests, reading against the grain, students can be taught to appreciate Huntington's "realization that increasingly, non-western states will seek to assert their own agency and will not readily concede to being socialized into a US-defined and dominated order."

Cultivating "Good Pirates"

Those interested in teaching IR in the Arab world find themselves at a time when new trends in critical and postcolonial IR theory as well as efforts within the movement of Global IR are offering alternatives to the Anglo-American mainstream approaches (Tickner and Smith 2020). They do not, however, have adequate texts and teaching tools, especially for those at public

institutions teaching in Arabic. To close this gap, teaching in the Arab world must become more closely tied to knowledge production and theory development within the Arab world and beyond. Many scholars across the Global South have sought to emulate the model of the "exile" who is familiar with multiple contexts and perspectives (Hazbun, Makdisi, and Hindawi 2019, 11-12). The insights developed from this approach should not remain isolated and always on the outside. They should promote more pluralist forms of IR theory development engaging efforts across the Global South (see Eun 2016) as well as within the Anglo-American world. IR students trained at institutions in the Arab world can play a critical role in this effort. In the language of the art critic Hickey (2013), IR instructors in the Arab world need to teach their students to become good pirates. They must recognize the important work of farmers in different places, who between their fences, cultivate scholarship based on existing theories and approaches. But they must also act as pirates who learn to teardown fences and cross borders driven by the quest to develop and promote new understandings of this complex, crisis ridden era of global politics.

3. Teaching an Islamic Paradigm of IR in Cairo

Amira Abou Samra

With the increasing diversity in IR theory beyond its Western-centric origins, there are emerging debates around researching and teaching religion in IR (Bettiza et al. 2019). While the IR study of Islam (among other religions) has grown exponentially in the last two decades in the IR discipline, there is little consideration that Islam itself contains theories of international relations. By contrast, scholars of Islam argue that the Quran and the Sunnah – or the Prophet's sayings – not only constructed a particular vision of a political order, but also material from which theories of IR can be culled. Consequently, an Islamic paradigm of IR offers an alternative non-Western-centric approach to international relations based on distinct ontological and epistemological perspectives. While scholarly work on Islamic IR is particularly limited, the foundations of an Islamic paradigm have found their way to postgraduate IR theory classes at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University since the 1990s. This essay will first unpack the features of an Islamic paradigm of IR with its unique ontological and epistemological positions. Then, it will examine the teaching of this paradigm at Cairo University to reflect on its challenges and constraints.

Theorizing Islamic International Relations

Scholars of Islam have developed what may be labelled as an Islamic paradigm of IR. Common to this paradigm is a unique ontology based on the belief in one God (*tawhid*), and that knowledge about the international is derived chiefly from the divine sources of the Quran and the biography of the Prophet or the Sunnah (Abu Sulayman 1987).

Classical approaches within this Islamic paradigm of IR are distinct from mainstream IR theories in the assumptions they make about actors and driving force (process), but also the issues they prioritize. For example, Islamic theories are not concerned with relations between sovereign states. Moreover, and whereas mainstream IR approaches focus on processes of war and conflict (realism), competition (liberalism), and class conflict (Marxism), Muslim states, from a traditionalist Islamic perspective, constitute one indivisible *umma*. The international is thus

constituted of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims exemplifying a worldview of an "inside" realm of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and an "outside" realm of war (*dar al-harb*) (Turner 2014, 67-70).

However, within this Islamic paradigm, the so-called Egyptian school concedes that states are important actors in international relations. On this Egyptian school perspective then, the *Umma* is bound by a *tawhidi* or monolithic worldview (Saleh 2008). The Egyptian school also argues that theorizing about contemporary international relations requires going beyond the traditional binary a "realm of Islam" and a "realm of war" to incorporate contemporary dynamics and interactions. Da'wah (inviting non-Muslims to Islam) remains a driving force of Muslim/Non-Muslim relations at all times, while *ta'arof* and *tadafo'* remain the drivers of all human interaction. *Ta'arof* involves peoples and groups getting to know each other, while *tadafo'* signifies interactions among them with a view toward adjusting the balance of power among them in a manner that sustains life on earth (Abdel-Fattah 1996). By applying these concepts to all human interactions, the Egyptian school is extending the validity of an Islamic paradigm from Muslim/non-Muslim relations to interactions between non-Muslims and non-Muslims. The Egyptian school posits that the value system embedded in the Quran and Sunnah offers answers to international problems in a way that might be useful to explain and guide international relations beyond the Muslim world (Abou Samra 2016). Based on this ontological perspective, then, an Islamic paradigm of IR offers an alternative understanding of a number of IR themes including global economic crises, migration, conflict, and war (Mostafa 2016).

From an epistemological perspective, an Islamic paradigm takes a distinct position on studying the international. Whereas IR theories are often dominated by a rational, positivist view of the world relying on causal explanations, an Islamic paradigm starts from the assumption that science is not value free. Instead, reality is subjective, and understandings of reality depend on the perspective adopted. An Islamic paradigm relies on transcendental sources (Quran and Sunnah) subject to human interpretations. Concomitantly, the purpose of theorizing in an Islamic paradigm is to guide change in the lifeworld. It follows then that an Islamic paradigm of IR shares some epistemological similarities with critical theories criticizing IR theories for their

traditional positivist theorizing (Cox 1981; Jones 2006; Abou Samra 2019). For example, feminist approaches in IR highlight the hidden biases in what seems to be a male-dominated IR literature (Tickner and Sjoberg 2016). Postcolonial approaches contend that non-Western histories are often side-lined in favor of a Eurocentric Westphalian narrative of the formation of the state system (Grovogui 2016), while some scholars identify an "epistemological racism" against knowledge produced by Muslims in the Social Sciences (Grosfoguel 2010). Finally, the global IR literature suggests that non-Western conceptions of the state, such as the Indian perspective, have been missing from traditional understandings of IR (Behera 2010).

Teaching an Islamic Paradigm of IR at Cairo University

The Islamic paradigm is taught at Cairo University in graduate IR courses in MA and PhD degrees (Mostafa 2010). Teaching the Islamic paradigm begins by situating it within the existing theoretical body of literature on IR theory, including mainstream approaches and non-Western critical theories (Shani 2008), while highlighting epistemological, ontological and methodological biases in the field. Teaching these courses relies on a list of assigned readings highlighting the theoretical plurality prevalent in IR (Smith 1995) as well as some serious metatheoretical differences between an Islamic paradigm on the one hand and mainstream positivist approaches on the other hand. These differences are taught with reference to the writings of Mona Abul-Fadl (1990) and Abdelwahab Elmessiri (1996) among others (Abdel-Fattah 1996; Badran 1996). Once situated within the IR theory literature, students could engage more with the assumptions of an Islamic paradigm.

The Islamic paradigm, particularly its Egyptian variant, owes its development to the teaching process. On the one hand, questions coming from an audience of fresh graduates guided scholars to further elaborate and clarify its assumptions. Egyptian students with frail connection with their own Islamic heritage — the consequence of a secular educational system — also found the paradigm at odds with everything they were taught throughout their undergraduate years in a curriculum heavily influenced by American positivist IR. They raised questions and concerns about the "explanatory" power of a "normative" theory such as the Islamic paradigm, and its ability to explain contemporary international relations. They

questioned the relevance of its 1400-year-old sources and pondered why the call was for an "Islamic" perspective not an "Arabic" one for example, and whether the development of an Islamic paradigm necessitates the development of a Christian or a Jewish IR paradigm (Mostafa 2010). Without even realizing it, their questions and doubts were emanating from their predominantly positivist understanding of international relations ingrained in their undergraduate training.

Many students are also intrigued by the Islamic paradigm as it compels them to reflect on the political reality of their everyday lives in the Arab world. As many of them question the biases in mainstream IR theories for reproducing the Western perspective in knowledge production on the Arab World, they find in the Islamic paradigm an alternative lens to provide another understanding to many regional phenomena. For example, Palestinian resistance to the occupation should not be labelled "terrorist," and refugees are human beings in need, not threats to national security, nor an opportunity to increase GDPs. By offering such alternative interpretation of the international, the paradigm offers new insights over the years into various undergraduate courses, such as "Culture in Global Politics," "Contemporary Global Issues" and "History of International Politics."

Conclusion

Teaching an Islamic paradigm of IR has been a crucial driver in reflecting and developing the paradigm's theoretical assumptions. This enterprise is not without constraints, however. Situating the paradigm ontologically and epistemologically within the diverse and rich theoretical map of IR theories and the discussion of unfamiliar topics, such as the Sikh's Khalsah Panth, during a limited period of 14 weeks has always been a challenge. Postgraduate students, especially from a non-Political Science background, particularly struggle to digest the theoretical content.

The political context at national, regional, and global levels adds additional challenges to teaching an Islamic paradigm of IR. Despite its theoretical development over the last two decades as an academic approach with no political affiliation, teaching an Islamic paradigm of

IR is a daunting task, considering the political struggles within Arab and Muslim countries and a rising global Islamophobia apprehensive of anything labelled “Islamic.” That said, teaching an Islamic paradigm of IR offers an alternative view on international relations derived from the region, its historical heritage, and its contemporary political challenges. Understanding and teaching IR in the Arab World not only requires reading Walt (1987) and Wendt (1999), but also reading Chatterjee (2011) and Mona Abul-Fadl (1990).

4. **Teaching International Relations Without IR in Moroccan Universities**

Said Saddiki

Morocco's geographical position has long placed it at the intersection of several geopolitical spheres: Africa, Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic Ocean.[1] This diversity is reflected in the historical and Islamic writings of Moroccan scholars before the colonial period. By the beginning of the Protectorate in 1912, French modern education began to dominate the educational system in terms of organization and content. Professors teaching IR in Moroccan universities in the post-independence years were either French or Moroccan graduates of French universities. The current content of educational programs remains largely inspired by the French educational system, especially the study of IR. Moreover, and much like in France (Roche 2002/3; Groom 2002/3), IR in major public universities in Morocco remains a topic of general knowledge more than a specialized discipline. This underrepresented position of IR studies in Moroccan public universities, whether as a discipline or as an academic community, spillovers to the political field: it is best expressed in the absence of a foreign policy establishment in the country and the negligible influence IR experts have on decision-making processes.

Scholarly interest in IR in Morocco has gone through two main phases. In the past decades, students gravitated towards critical theories, but especially Marxism and Neo-Marxism as best expressed in the late Samir Amin's (1974) work on core-periphery relations. This was due to the leftist wave that influenced generations of post-independence intellectuals, activists, and students. In this first phase, Marxist theories dominated debates in Moroccan universities and shaped students' perception of international relations. The second phase is more recent, with

[1] This essay is focused on teaching IR in major public universities in IR, where IR is taught in both Arabic and French. IR is also taught in Morocco minor elite universities, such as Al Akhawayn University which has operated under state auspices since 1995 and Mohammed VI Polytechnic's FGSES Institute. Reflections are based on a survey of seven faculty members who teach theories of IR at major public Moroccan universities. The author would like to thank the following colleagues: Mohamed Nachtaoui, Professor, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech; Smail Kouttroub, Professor, Mohammed V University, Rabat; Abdelhamid Benkhattab, Associate Professor, Mohammed V University, Rabat; Khalid Chiat, Professor, Mohammed First University, Oujda; Houcine Chougrani, Associate Professor, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech; Reda El Fellah, Associate Professor, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir; and Abderrahim El-Maslouhi, Professor, Mohammed V University, Rabat.

students increasingly preoccupied with the American literature subscribing to realism in IR. Consequently, they deploy power politics to explain international relations, especially realism and neorealism. Realist concepts, such as national interest, balance of power and "no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests," are all rehashed constantly in exam papers and classroom debates. More importantly, a generation of young researchers is increasingly interested in neorealism. The translation of core publications and lectures of neorealist works, especially by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, has facilitated its circulation and application among this younger generation of scholars. Also, a small number of researchers have also started deploying liberal concepts, particularly interdependence, soft power, and regional integration to explain Morocco's foreign relations. This is a result of their appreciation of liberalism's utility for the creation of a prospective roadmap to solve Morocco's problems with Algeria and rebuild the Arab Maghreb Union. The remainder of this essay is dedicated to a discussion of the pedagogical and institutional obstacles impeding the production of IR knowledge and teaching in major public universities in Morocco.

Teaching International Relations Without IR

Albeit Moroccan universities boast a long history, they produce very little IR knowledge. To begin with, faculty teaching IR theories at Moroccan public universities are not always IR specialists. They may have studied IR theories during their graduate training, but this is limited to major theories, without any practical application to case studies. Those who may have used IR theory in their dissertation would not have necessarily applied it rigorously in their research. Nor would they go on to develop their theoretical skills during the postdoctoral period. Consequently, there is no systematic training in IR theories in undergraduate programs in Moroccan public universities. Some graduate programs cover IR theories, yet this is done without rigorous theoretical training. At the undergraduate level, Moroccan universities, like their French counterparts, adopt a classical approach to IR teaching, using lectures and tutorial formats. Some law schools, where IR courses are usually offered, privilege tutorials to enable students to improve their theoretical knowledge of IR. However, this training remains abstract in nature as it does not connect theoretical knowledge to the real world beyond the classroom.

Like other Maghreb states, Morocco follows the French method in the classification of academic disciplines. IR, as well as Political Science, are a branch of Public Law, and are sometimes taught by professors of International Law or other branches of Public Law. Consequently, the teaching of IR combines both legal and political dimensions. This is undoubtedly an advantage if used creatively, but it negatively affects the specialization of students in IR as it conflates IR with legal studies. As a result, many Moroccan professors introduce themselves as IR professors, but, in reality, they are specialists in Public International Law. In fact, most IR professors in Morocco hold a Doctorate in Law degree, even though they are IR specialists. Some faculty members succeed in balancing their academic identity between International Relations and International Law as two sides of the same coin, others find themselves neither here nor there. This disciplinary crisis undermines IR teaching. This is compounded by the place IR theories occupy as a small section in the undergraduate course "Introduction to International Relations."

Institutional and political contexts in Morocco discourage but do not forbid theoretical research. In fact, the impediments to theoretical research in IR are not political or cultural, but rather have more to do with methodological, technical and historical legacies. Moroccan public universities also suffer from a host of structural problems in terms of human resources, logistics, and research funding. They have disproportionate faculty-to-student ratios and suffer from large disparities among disciplines in term of the number of professors. Some universities also suffer from a shortage of faculty members specializing in IR. For example, the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Social Science in Agdal-Rabat, which has historically been the main source for top echelon government officials and members of the royal cabinet, assigns professors from legal disciplines to teach IR. Another obstacle to a proper IR training involves the faculty's limited scope in determining the content of their courses, with only minor exceptions at the level of Master's programs. Public universities are the backbone of higher education in Morocco, and a large compulsory component of the curricula is determined by the Ministry of Higher Education and not professors. Finally, the French colonial legacy continues to influence Moroccan higher education, whether in terms of the language of instruction, course content, or the location of some subjects in the curriculum. The same curricula are taught in both Arabic

and French; students choose one path or the other, and most professors are bilingual. As aforementioned, IR and Political Science courses are taught in the School of Law rather than that of the School of Art and Sciences. Of course, all this does not take away from attempts by professors in Morocco to promote the study of the theoretical dimensions of International Relations over the past three decades. In the 1980s, many professors working in the School of Law demonstrated a clear tendency to abandon formal legal approaches because of their limited explanatory power of Morocco's regional and international relations. Henceforth, there was a palpable openness to alternative theoretical approaches to the study of the country's international relations. However, new reforms introduced to higher education, and expected to be adopted in Moroccan public universities during the 2021-2022 academic year, reduce the time devoted to International Relations in undergraduate programs. This is bound to adversely affect even more the future of IR studies in Moroccan public universities.

Pedagogical Constraints on IR Teaching

Students find it very difficult to understand IR theories because of a background deficit in theoretical and methodological training. This also affects their ability to digest and interact with the content of IR courses. Moreover, professors often assume that their students have already covered the foundations of philosophy and social theories during their high schools, and that these skills allow a reasonable degree of abstract thinking that would enable them to interact positively and effectively with the course content. This is rarely the case, however. Moreover, and instead of a case-based approach relying on case studies that connect IR theories to the real world beyond the classroom, IR courses taught at law schools are limited to explaining theories and concepts in an abstract manner where students are passively listening to lectures and memorizing notes, which do not lend itself to critical thinking.

Another important challenge facing IR teaching in Morocco pertains to class-room size and dynamics. The impact of lectures on students depends on two factors: the number of students in each class and the available university infrastructure. Some undergraduate classes in law schools are composed of more than 1000 students. Large amphitheaters gathering hundreds of students are not suitable for teaching IR theories in a critical fashion. Seminars, workshops and

interaction with students based on modern educational tools and information technologies can complement lectures and allow active student engagement. But this is more so at the graduate level than the undergraduate, however. Graduate courses may well be the only site for the cultivation of critical skills in IR. The size of graduate seminars lends them more for interactive teaching and learning. Indeed, students prefer open class discussions over lectures because the former allows them to express their opinions on current affairs and debate political topics. In the short term, it is difficult to apply modern teaching techniques, especially in undergraduate programs.

All these pedagogical factors affect the level of student interaction with knowledge in general, including IR theories particularly. Paradoxically, some faculty members opt for the easiest solution: alleging that undergraduate students find IR theories abstract and difficult to comprehend, they remove them from their course material altogether! After all, students tend to care more about current news and political events than theoretical debates. This is evident in their answers to exam questions, which tend to digress from the main themes and venture to real events. There is, however, a healthy burgeoning interest in theoretical debates but only at the level of graduate theses. There is also a noticeable development in the technological infrastructures of Moroccan universities, but it is not commensurate with the large number of students in law schools that attract thousands each year.

Conclusion

Any attempt to advance the quality of IR teaching in Moroccan universities will remain limited as long as IR is considered a part of the discipline of legal studies. Descriptive and normative approaches fashionable in legal studies impedes the development of a sophisticated IR field. So does the over-reliance on French IR textbooks, despite the growing use of the English ones during the past years. Curiously, this runs against a long tradition of theoretical and critical knowledge production in Morocco, and North Africa more generally: from Ibn Khaldun's magisterial and foundational works in sociology (Sune 2016), Mahdi Elmandjra's (1992) call for a dialogue of civilizations, and through Aziz Hasbi's (2004) solitary book in French on IR

theories, one that, ironically, has made almost no academic impact in Morocco because most IR professors do not know it exists!

5. Discipline and Flourish: Teaching IR in the Arab World

Adham Saouli

The modern classroom is an astonishing meeting place. It brings together individuals with a common interest in a discipline, yet with varying academic and cultural backgrounds, passions, expectations, and ambitions. They intermingle. Sometimes clash. But ultimately reach their individual and , sometimes, common pursuits. My perception of the classroom was reinforced after I taught a *Seminar in International Relations Theory* to two cohorts at the Doha Institute of Graduate Studies (DI). This experience underlined several institutional and cultural challenges and opportunities. I here examine two: What are the challenges/opportunities of teaching IR in the Arab world? What are the constraints/opportunities of teaching the discipline in Arabic? Drawing on my own observations and the experiences of other colleagues, I find that despite some obstacles, IR offers immense opportunities for Arab students.

Discipline and Context

The institutional and cultural contexts teachers find themselves in shape their teaching, but only to an extent. DI attracts some of the brightest Arab students to its graduate programs. They come from different corners of the Arab world and from varying academic and social backgrounds. Teaching them presented numerous opportunities but also challenges.

The most rewarding aspect of teaching IR to students, in the Arab world and elsewhere, is that IR with its various theoretical approaches offers ways to *see* the political world (Liu 2016, 6; Da'na 2020; Almezaini 2020). These approaches, both positivist and post-positivist, help students grasp a rather complex (and sometimes apparently chaotic) world. It disciplines their

perception of the international system and relations among political actors; it challenges their preconceptions (Burns 2014). In the process it triggers critical thinking. For example, Arab students come to class with the idea that politics is about being "realistic," associating this with Realism. Since we usually start with the "timeless wisdom" of Realism, some of their initial thoughts are reassured. I found the need to challenge these notions even more at DI. Arab political discourse on televisions, radios, and social media, tends to reinforce the notion that "all politics is about interests" and "that you have to be a political realist." This is sometimes confused with Realism, a mistake that even some academics inflict on their audiences. But as students are exposed to other schools, such as Constructivism and Marxism, they begin to develop more sophisticated understandings of how interests are made. Burns (2014, 176) has also found that "conspiracy and powerlessness" permeate Arab students' perceptions, an observation that I also share. But I also have seen how various approaches in IR tend to shake conceptions in the world or at least offer new intellectual grounds to renegotiate them. As such, as Liu (2016, 7) has found, these processes encourage critical thinking.

Teaching and learning IR, moreover, offers a framework to discuss heated political topics, which are repressed in some Arab countries, in a scholarly and systematic manner. The questions that IR raises and seeks to answer—such as the causes of war, intervention, economic blockades, identity and foreign policy—offer innovative tools to understand and explain contemporary political issues. For example, discussing constructivism, particularly processes of norm diffusion, offers a scholarly framework to discuss how international human rights norms, whether of migrants or women, diffuse and then shape debates at local settings. This, of course, is also true of discussing postcolonial theory, which opens avenues to rethink relations of the Arab world to dominant international powers. I, and others (Hamchi 2020; Da'na 2020; Almezaini 2020), have found that many Arab students find IR approaches useful, though the political setting in some countries, especially the Gulf, tends to curb deep discussion of certain, sensitive topics.

But teaching IR in the Arab world also presents challenges. IR is a relatively new discipline. It is loaded with theory. Despite its claims to universality, the discipline is largely Anglo-American. This places a heavy weight on students who approach IR, especially non-western students (see also Liu 2016). For many of my DI students, exposure to IR approaches was difficult. Some had no previous contact with IR. Many others did not engage heavily with social theory before joining the program. Still many others did not understand the historical events that gave rise to the discipline and/or the theories that constitute it. In addition to the language barrier, which I will explore below, many students do not read enough (see also Burns 2014) or if they did, they might find it difficult to understand the admittedly difficult substance. And this is especially important to understand the various theories. Inevitably, and this is not unique to the Arab world, some students warm to theories but others find them dry, boring, or unreal (Hamchi 2020; Da'na 2020).

These challenges, which could potentially alienate students from IR, can be mitigated. The starting point is to acknowledge that students are products of specific socio-cultural contexts. These contexts shape their perceptions, visions, needs, and interests. The teacher, as a bridge between a body of knowledge and the students, needs to be conscious of these socio-cultural differences (see also Liu 2016, 4-5). I am not saying anything new here; I am merely reiterating the old mantra of "know your audience." The knowledge a teacher presents needs to resonate with the students' context, intellectual curiosities, and social needs. Bridging IR theories to contemporary Arab political debates is useful, as Da'na (2020), who taught the subject at Birzeit University, emphasizes. I concur. I once asked my students if the current attempts by some Arab states to normalize relations with Israel form a change in interests or a change in norms? I conspired to divide my students and let theory conquer the discussion. My strategy largely succeeded: the class broke into realist and constructivist camps (though some had no idea what we were doing!). As expected, they did not reach a consensus. They have, however, learned that whilst theories are useful, they are also limited. It helped that I was also teaching the students another course on *Politics of the Middle East* that offered the empirical basis to engage and judge theories.

Second, whilst some might condemn lectures as old fashioned and instead campaign for class discussions and exercises, I have found that lectures, granted that they are interactive, are useful avenues to introduce IR to students. My DI students agree as evidenced from student class evaluation. This is particularly useful for students who find the theoretical and historical material difficult. Lectures narrow the gap between the literature and the students and offer a general framework that highlights the philosophical origins, assumptions, and methodologies of various approaches. On the other hand, class discussions and watching of movies (at DI I showed *Thirteen Days*, *Nasser 56*, *The Battle of Algiers*, and *Hotel Rwanda*) facilitates the learning process. It, then, does not take long to realize that students in DI begin to develop their own thoughts of and affinities to specific theories. Some become more cautious in their use of Realism, Marxists begin to appreciate the role of the "political," realists begin to take norms seriously. At that point you realize that the discipline had its imprint on students, offering them the basis to flourish, even beyond it.

Found in Translation

What about teaching IR in Arabic? Whilst English and French are used in many universities across the Arab world, most institutions, naturally, use Arabic. For DI, teaching in Arabic is integral to the institute's core mission: to celebrate and promote the Arabic language and through it to produce indigenous, Arab knowledge. And language, you will agree, is much more than a communication tool: it is a set of concepts and expressions that have cultural and historical significance. This, also, presents constraints and opportunities.

Most of the fast-growing literature in IR is written in English. Translating its main concepts and theories into Arabic is difficult. Anarchy, dependency, or socialization are not only words, but concepts that have been cautiously developed by IR scholars. They form the language of IR, which may also be difficult for English native speakers. For example, one Arabic review of my book *The Arab State*: *Dilemmas of Late formation* (Saouli 2012) disastrously translated anarchy to "*fawdawiya*," meaning chaos, which resonates with Arab debates on the so-called American-

designed "*al-fawda al-khallaqa"* or creative chaos, and thus missed a significant concept in the book's argument. Teachers, again, have a key role to play here. We need to emphasize the conceptual and theoretical content of these words: offer the best possible translation in Arabic, whilst keeping the original concept in English in parenthesis. Sometimes, though, importing the concept as it is might be more practical. I sought advice on the best translation of anarchy in Arabic and a colleague suggested that I should simply use "*anarkiya*." He made my day; I then realized that this Greek word will not be the first import into the Arabic (and English) language! It might also help to include an Arabic glossary of main concepts in translated books which students can refer to.

Another challenge is to find sources in Arabic (Da'na 2020; Hamchi 2020; Almezaini 2020). Whilst some key IR texts and works are available in Arabic, the supply of Arabic sources remains short. One reason is that most Arab scholars who produce IR work, especially on the region, graduated from Anglo-American universities and have written in English and/or have worked in institutions that teach in English in the Arab world. As the translation of books to Arabic does not follow the fast pace of their production, this leaves students and teachers with a very short supply of IR literature. This situation is further aggravated when you consider the poorly translated literature (Hamchi 2020).

You can argue, of course, that students can refer to the original, English sources. For some that is possible. A student working on the "politicization of refugees in Lebanon" asked me for a relevant theoretical framework. Without a blink, I suggested Securitization Theory. She found the framework very useful, but this was possible because her English is strong. But many teachers and students do not possess the required English skills to dig deep in original theoretical work. This, I and others (Hamchi 2020; Almezaini 2020) have found particularly constraining. It seems to me knowing English is an indispensable avenue to benefit from IR in the Arab world. But for institutions such as DI this poses a predicament: too much focus on English sources, threatens the promotion of the Arabic language; a stress on Arabic sources, on the other hand, weakens the capacity to produce cutting-edge IR research. Breaking free of this

predicament means that, first, Arab students need to know English to make the best of the available IR theoretical and conceptual tools and, second, to utilize these tools to develop the literature in Arabic. Signs of this trend are beginning to emerge. A 2019 issue of *Siyasaat Arabia*, an Arabic journal of Political Science, featured interesting IR articles such as the "parsimony principle," "causation in IR," and "rational choice theory in foreign policy." The articles draw on and critique various IR approaches; they offer indispensable material for teachers and researchers in the Arab world. Moreover, new work is emerging on critical security studies (such as Kougili 2014) in Arabic.

Researching and studying IR in Arabic offers useful opportunities. Attempts to translate concepts such as the state, nation, or structure, do not only ease the teaching of a "foreign" discipline. The search for Arabic translations of difficult concepts has a revivalist hint to it: it offers the intellectual space to, first, explore and develop concepts from the rich repertoire of the Arabic language and, second, to rethink the suitability of the concept in Arab politics.

This, all, might make IR less foreign for some or hegemonic for others.

6. The Personal and the Political: Teaching IR in Kuwait

Hamad H. Albloshi

After graduating from the department of Political Science at Kuwait University (KU), I pursued gradual studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States. My years at Fletcher have deeply influenced my views toward academic life in general and teaching in particular. It exposed me to a different intellectual environment based on free discussions in classrooms, critical thinking, and learning by understanding concepts rather than memorizing them. Few professors at KU paid attention to those tools when I was a student there. After concluding my graduate studies, I came back to Kuwait, and I wanted to bring this experience with me to my classrooms at KU through encouraging critical thinking, class discussions, and assignment-based learning. Nevertheless, my endeavors, and those of like-minded colleagues, have often faced various challenges at Kuwait University, which have affected our teaching capabilities and ability to conduct research. This essay will deal with these obstacles, which are political and institutional. It will also discuss ways to overcome them in teaching international relations.

The political and institutional context

The department of Political Science at KU offering both bachelor and master's degrees, is operating in Kuwait, a country with a semi-democratic system that allows limited political participation and freedom of expression. This system provides opportunities for scholars and researchers to teach and conduct research in the country without fearing interventions from the authorities. In this regard, the political situation in Kuwait is relatively better than other countries in the region, where political participation and freedom of expression do not exist, which often plays a major constraint on teaching and research. The government does not force political scientists to support its policies nor defend them in the media unlike some of Kuwait's neighbors. Similarly, there is no interference in preparing their syllabi and whatever they believe is useful to teach their students. Books banned publicly can even be assigned to students in the safe space of the classroom without the interference of the authorities. That

said, freedom of expression is not absolute, and there are limitations that scholars and researchers working in Kuwait are constantly navigating in their teaching.

The most important limitation is the law that prohibits challenging or criticizing the authorities of the Emir (Prince). Scholars are cautious not to cross this line while conducting a research or teaching a class on Kuwaiti domestic politics or Kuwait's foreign policy. In addition, the political environment in the country may have negative repercussions for scholars. Scholarly publications addressing political sensitive issues are often met with offensive reactions from the society, often holding a political view in these issues. The latest example was the case of Shafeeq Alghabra (2018), a political scientist, who was attacked after publishing a book in 2018 on the Palestinian diaspora in Kuwait. He argued that some Kuwaiti fighters illegally killed and assassinated some Palestinians who had been accused of cooperating with Iraq during its occupation of Kuwait in 1990–91. The book clearly addressed a highly politicized episode in Kuwait's history, and the book was attacked publicly on social media, and the government banned the book.

Due to these limits on freedom of expression in Kuwait, scholars and academics are cautious in their research and teaching. Most recently, this was reflected in the responses to the suspension of teaching at KU due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gave rise to a country-wide debate on whether to rely on online learning due to its repercussion on freedom of expression in the classroom. While there are professors who support this option, others refuse to teach online until clear rules are made to protect instructors, especially at schools of law, literature, and social sciences, against harsh measures that might be taken against them by the authorities if they had to deal with controversial topics. In other words, because freedom of expression is not totally granted in the country, ideas or statements made by professors might be misinterpreted by the authorities and can endanger them if these are posted online or on social media.

The second limitation revolves around institutional structures. Despite being a wealthy country, KU is the only public university in Kuwait. Kuwaiti students do not pay fees and get monthly payment from the government. This makes KU an attractive destination for many people. The

university admits more than 6,000 students each year, and this large cohort puts pressure on faculty members to teach three to four classes per semester, which can affect their ability to prepare for each class properly. Also, the university does not have enough teaching assistants (TAs). A TA position at KU is a full-time job, which is not done by graduate students, but by employees who apply for the job, and get employed for the TA job that many of them do as a career. There are few TAs in each department, and not all of them are trained or have the skills to teach the subjects. This ultimately reduces the ability of faculty members to offer research-based teaching.

The third limitation is related to bureaucratic rules at KU, which affect teaching and training of students. Attempts to change curricula in order to teach new subjects may take a long time, which ultimately frustrates faculty members and leads them to surrender to what has been taught in their departments for a long time. This limits staff's ability to update the teaching content in line with recent knowledge production in the field, which ultimately affects knowledge, experience, and skills gained by graduates from the university. Moreover, teaching some subjects, including Political Science, is in Arabic. Professors often rely on relatively outdated Arabic textbooks or translated books that do not cover the current state of the art in the subject. Few scholars in Kuwait (or in the Arab World) write textbooks, as they are discouraged by the promotion system at KU that does not count textbooks as academic achievements. Due to the lack of academic sources in Arabic and considering the limited resources and time that academics in the Arab world often grapple with, professors just rely on a few available sources among them is the translated Arabic version of the *Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (Evans and Newnham 2004).

Teaching IR in Kuwait

Institutional and bureaucratic obstacles are particularly visible when teaching IR at KU. The IR discipline has evolved around changes and challenges in the international system. In the post-Cold era, several developments in the international system prompted theoretical development within the discipline. Yet, due to limited Arabic sources and the constraints in updating teaching content, the IR curriculum at KU and textbooks does not reflect the state of the discipline. In my

own teaching, I have developed a number of strategies to address these challenges. One way to overcome those obstacles is by translating some of the main arguments of the new theories or by explaining recent debates among IR scholars in classrooms, and I ask students to take notes. I also provide a list of recent publications in the field to students who read English as additional readings.

Teaching IR at KU is also faced with challenges in the classroom. In my endeavor to create a space in the classroom for students to think critically and engage with IR theories, a key component is to generate interest in the material and bring international relations phenomenon as real-life phenomena to students. Some students are not interested in theories and find them "boring" unless they revolve around cases that they can see and be able to "feel," as some of them say. In order to help students to understand IR theories and concepts instead of memorizing them, it is important to find ways to make them relevant and resonant. Thus, applying theories to some historical cases is useful, but more fruitful is applying these theories to current international affairs or Middle East politics.

Bringing theories and world events to the classroom often unravels, in my experience, tensions in the students' minds between identity and the survival of the country. Kuwaitis, in general, are preoccupied with the experience of 1990-91, and the fact that the country was occupied within hours is a reminder of Kuwait's vulnerability. Studying IR theories, most students lean toward realism more than other theories. They do believe that national interests and survival are the most important principals based on their experience from Kuwait. For some students the interests of Kuwait should be given the priority. This position become even clearer as I use some provocative counterfactual scenarios in the classroom (cf. Junio and Mahnken 2013). In one scenario, I ask students to imagine that Kuwait is under imminent threats from Iraq. Iraq, in the scenario, wants to occupy Kuwait unless the latter gives up two of its islands in the north. At the same time, the whole world, except Israel, cannot immediately assist Kuwait. Despite acknowledging the importance of boycotting Israel, the majority of the students think that the most effective solution is to seek Israel's help to prevent the attack, before seeking help from other nations or international organizations. The exercise shows that students pay attention to

the country's survival more than the Palestinian cause or their feelings towards Jerusalem, which is part of their overall identity.

I also rely on simulations as teaching tools to generate students' interest in the material and develop their critical thinking. I use the Syrian civil war, and I divide students into groups and each of them would represent a country, or a Syrian political faction (cf. Frank and Genauer 2019; Raymond and Sorensen 2008). Each group has to read about the country or the faction it represents and bring their perspective to the class. This exercise encourages students to review IR theories and concepts, such as alliance formation or cooperation. Moreover, it encourages them to learn about civil wars, including the case of the Syrian civil war and the motives of various actors involved. In addition, I use novels in teaching international politics of human rights, which can be a tool to bring IR issues closer to the everyday lives of students. For example, I ask students to read *Erevan* by Gilbert Sinoué (2009) on the Armenian genocide and *The Bamboo Stalk* by Saud Alsanousi (2015) on discrimination in Kuwait.

Conclusion

Based on my relatively short teaching experience, I do believe that teaching IR in Kuwait, despite positive issues mentioned above, poses multiple challenges due to the regional and national political context, as well as institutional and bureaucratic obstacles at KU, and scholars have to navigate through these barriers. This environment does not encourage many faculty members to bring their experience in different western institutions and apply it to their classrooms in the region. Since there are limitations on freedom of expression in the country, critical thinking and free discussions might be applied in classrooms, but to a certain extent. Professors always have to be cautious not to cross the redlines drawn by the law or societal norms. To overcome bureaucratic barriers and the lack of resources, the younger generations in the field try to overcome these obstacles by using unconventional tools in their classrooms to help students digest the main concepts and engage with the most recent debates among IR scholars while linking this contemporary events in their national, regional, and international environment. Some of the obstacles discussed here exist in other non-Arab Middle Eastern

countries as well. In other words, these obstacles are related to local and regional contexts, which can play crucial roles in shaping IR teaching.

7. Teaching International Relations "Out of Place" in Beirut:

Evolving Through the Experience of Everyday Politics and Insecurity

Karim Makdisi

I have been teaching international relations in/from Beirut since 2004. Since then, the Middle Eastern regional order has been radically reshaped, particularly in the aftermath of US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent decline in, and contestation of, US legitimacy and the global (neo)liberal order it has long underwritten. The region has seen a surge in direct international intervention and massive transfer of weapons; proliferation of US-directed sanctions regimes; multiple Israeli invasions of Gaza and Lebanon; increased prominence of transnational actors and networks from ISIS to Hizbullah; unprecedented flows of displaced and refugees; consolidation of Iran as the head of a regional resistance block against the hegemonic US-Israeli-Saudi order; growing influence of Russia, Turkey, and China; and the more recent wars, atrocities, and national mass mobilizations throughout the region, from Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen to Syria, Palestine, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon itself. The US has also just brokered a formal normalization treaty between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, with other Gulf countries expected to follow. This is, symbolically at least, a seismic regional shift and effectively extends Israeli weapons to Iran's borders.

It is impossible to separate these "live" events from our in-class discussions or escape the reality that we are swept up in these transformations. Teachers and students, many of whom come from different parts of the Middle East, have participated directly in, or felt a great sense of insecurity stemming from these unfolding events. While felt mostly on personal or societal levels, this sense of insecurity also manifests at the institutional level. Some faculty and students worry that academic freedom is seriously compromised—as in Egypt, Palestine/Israel or the UAE—or further eroded. US-chartered universities (including in Lebanon), controversially, are now required to vet all faculty hires and invited guests in line with the "Specially Designated Nationals List" maintained by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Some faculty also worry that online teaching tools may subject them to increased surveillance for "controversial" topics.

In the context of these transformations, my pedagogical approach to IR has necessarily evolved critically through the very act of teaching and interaction with students and institutional constraints, as well as with the everyday politics and sense of insecurity we encounter together. I have grappled with the tension between, on the one hand, ensuring students receive the requisite theoretical training crucial to engaging with the dominant IR literature and methods (see Salloukh's essay in this forum on the importance of such training); and, on the other hand, introducing ways of thinking relevant to the lived experience, struggles and sense of insecurity in the Arab region and larger Global South (which I will largely focus on in this short essay).

Being Out of Place

My challenge as I evolved as a teacher was how to balance this tension in a coherent manner. With a background rooted in the humanities and graduate training in a professional/policy-oriented IR program at The Fletcher School in the United States, I did not receive the classic training in the field of International Relations or Political Science. As such, I initially carried a feeling of being somewhat "out of place" (Said 1999). Over time, I feel my approach has evolved from teaching the IR canon to incorporating from my own background more relevant scholarship and experiences tailored to students' needs.

During my first few years teaching introductory and mid-level undergraduate courses I relied exclusively on popular IR textbooks and stuck tightly to the disciplinary coverage and even chapter order eschewing counter-histories and theories. The first textbook I used was Russett, Starr, and Kinsella's (2012) *World Politics: The Menu for Choice*, with its compelling though rationalist focus on how (US) decision-makers use the available "Menu" to make rational decisions on (US) foreign policy. The textbook used a modified level of analysis approach, with clear delineation between the national and international. We studied how the great powers navigated two world wars, Cold War stalemate, and post-Cold War liberal

moment followed by the “war on terror.” In all this, “we” Arabs and those in the Global South were not relevant to these debates except as objects or off-shoots of great power proxy wars, state-building and the fight against terrorism.

I then shifted to Baylis, Smith and Owen’s (2014) *The Globalization of World Politics* textbook, with its more expansive themes, wider set of theoretical (and critical) approaches and deeper historical emphasis. Even with this, however, the “global” history and issues were largely Eurocentric. I tried a couple of other similar IR textbooks, increasingly tending to the more critical ones, but with the same results. While excellent, and crucial, for introducing students to the mainstream IR debates, for many of my engaged students, the approaches in these textbooks seemed disconnected form their lives and everyday politics around them.

Over time, I started teaching mostly Masters-level seminars, including within the newly created graduate program in public policy and international affairs that necessitated a clearer connection between theory and practice. I gradually adapted my course content and pedagogical approach to better align with my inter-disciplinary humanities background, and, more importantly what I felt students in our region needed to learn and debate. The intrusion of everyday politics had more visibly reached our campus: even student elections across Lebanon, for example, had become contested and controversial political events tracked by national media, with both local and regional implications. I felt that drawing from the humanities greatly enhanced my ability to work with students to critically read texts and think about them discursively within the larger frame of empire, race, class, power and struggle for justice. For my seminar on the politics of the United Nations, for example, I devote ample time to reading and dissecting primary texts and resolutions, such as the ambivalent UN resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war, and which comprises multiple contested narratives yet to be resolved.

The shift in my teaching over time thus included significantly more emphasis on critical, post-colonial and sociological approaches rooted in structures of power and historical contexts relevant to our region. Hierarchy and the colonial origins of international relations seem like more natural starting points to the study and practice of IR, along with anti-colonial assorted

resistances. The turn to Global IR has been influential for us in adding theoretical and empirical depth to class discussions. In line with Acharya (2018), for instance, we debate how core IR concepts such as "sovereignty" are not as clear-cut as mainstream IR scholarship assumes, particularly as students largely perceive events as simultaneously international and local. They struggle to think analytically of, for instance, the US, Iran or even the United Nations as purely "external" actors supporting or interfering with Lebanon's sovereignty. Instead, they are treated *equally* as "local" actors such as in their visible presence materially and ideationally.

The Agency of Students

My approach increasingly takes seriously the question of agency, and how mainstream IR tradition denies the very agency of people we regularly interact with in and beyond the classroom (Makdisi 2020, 361). To my surprise, I grapple with how resistant many students, Lebanese and Arabs in particular, are to granting "locals" agency such is the dominance of "us" being pawns in the larger chess game of great powers. For them, Realism is essentially the default IR conceptual starting point, so apparently obvious is the basic claim of power politics and prevalence of military intervention to our lived experience. For similar reasons, (neo)liberalism is initially the least convincing, reflecting students' innate skepticism towards the practice and perceived double-standard of international law and institutions, particularly when it comes to systematic and unchecked Israeli violations.

It was very important for me, then, to recover this sense of agency in not only resisting or reacting to the "international" (West) but also in producing regional and global orders**.** As I argue with colleagues elsewhere, teaching from Beirut entails considering approaches and encouraging class discussions focused on "local understandings of insecurity" in which "local actors might play a meaningful role in shaping practices of global governance" (Hazbun, Makdisi, and Hindawi 2019). How should we theoretically understand disarmament or climate change, or the UN, from our vantage point? Interestingly, I have consistently found that students are attracted to (critical) constructivism and Gramscian approaches once they are able to grasp them.

I have also felt the need to increasingly use Lebanon and the Middle East as a laboratory to add nuance and recover a sense of contestation to the production of global order. I found that our students engage with material drawn from and connecting other fields that add rich empirical depth lacking in IR literature. As Korany (2009, 175) argues, connecting IR to area studies is fundamental to move beyond claims of "universally applicable" theories and "law-like generalizations" by those scholars who neither visit regions in the Global South, nor consult works about them. Thinking about R2P, for example, in the context of expert meetings in Canada or the UN rarely solicits as interesting discussion as tying it closely not just to an ahistorical "case study" of Libya or Syria but rather the larger history of intervention rooted in the specificities of the Libyan or Syrian context. While less directly emotionally connected to students, contemporary relatable case studies drawn from some parts of the Global South (e.g. Rwanda genocide) do provoke interesting debates. However, this does not apply to all such cases, notably from South Asia or South America that are analyzed with far more detachment.

Overall, then, the pedagogical approach in my seminars tends to be consistent in terms of overall structure, but as it developed over time the course content has changed significantly to better resonate with students and reflect what I felt they needed. One of these needs was recovering the sense of *struggle*, both conceptually and in practice. Writers and theorists such as Samir Amin, Frantz Fanon, Richard Falk and Edward Said strongly resonated with me, and helped me understand the world in ways that complemented the work of established IR scholars from Waltz and Ikenberry to Wendt and Onuf. In my UN seminar, for example, course content evolved from relying mainly on the excellent classic textbook *United Nations and Changing World Politics* (Weiss et al 2016), to include more contested and critical histories, such as Mazower's (2008) brilliant work on the idea of the UN that he links to the British Empire. I also now include films, eyewitness accounts and scholarship by those in the Arab world or Global South whose agency turned the UN into sites of struggle for legitimacy rather than simply a reflection of power politics (Makdisi and Prashad 2017).

Another major influence shaping an aspect of my pedagogical approach that resonates with students is my regular engagement with those outside the walls of academia, connecting

the social (and policy) world to the scholarly discussions in the classroom. My first job was at the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, where I regularly interacted with civil society actors and policymakers in the Middle East. When I shifted to academia, I took these experiences with me into the classroom. Students have generally responded enthusiastically to sessions involving practitioners (such as Lakhdar Brahimi) and activists, and many have informed me that this adds real value in understanding concepts they often feel detached from. I also continued in my work to engage with the policy world, for instance being part of the official Lebanese delegation to several conference of the parties to the UN Climate Change Convention. This "insider" status and networks within and beyond the UN has given me added legitimacy in class in explaining the disconnect between theories and practice of international institutions and law, and, again, the role of struggles (and violence) in challenging the normalized power structures embedded within them.

Acknowledgment:

We would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for the insightful comments on previous drafts. This forum evolved from a workshop hosted by the Lebanese American University (LAU) in December 2019, and organized by the Arab Political Science Network (APSN) with funding from the Ford Foundation, the APSA MENA Alumni program, and the Danish Institute in Damascus.

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