

Transnationally entangled (in)securities: The UAE, Turkey, and the Saharan political economy of danger

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Eva Magdalena Stambøl 

University of Oslo, Norway & Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Tobias Berger

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Abstract

Contemporary security interventions in Africa are characterized by an increasing pluralization of external actors, bringing with them new security rationalities, practices, and technologies, sometimes with profound influences on local security dynamics. While studies have focused empirically on East and South Africa, this article explores the roles of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey in the Sahel region of West Africa. To make sense of their engagement, we develop the notion of ‘transnational security entanglements’ by bringing the literature on (in)security assemblages into productive dialogue with scholarship on transnational entanglements in the fields of global history and law. Both literatures depart from relational ontologies, eschew methodological nationalism, and emphasize the interplay between the human and the non-human in the making of the social world. At the same time, we argue, the focus on entanglements adds a specific analytic of South–South connections and transregional circulations to extant scholarship on (in)security assemblages. To illustrate the importance of these transregional connections beyond the North Atlantic, we draw on interviews and media reports about the myriad ways in which connections between the UAE and Turkey with various actors in the Sahel shape current transformations of political orders in the region.

Keywords

Decentering, entanglements, (in)security assemblage, Sahel, Turkey, United Arab Emirates

Introduction

Security interventions in Africa increasingly include countries like China, Russia, India, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia, which bring with them new security rationalities, practices, and technologies, and sometimes have profound influences on local security

Corresponding author:

Eva Magdalena Stambøl, University of Oslo, Norway & Freie Universität Postboks 6706 St. Olavs plass, OSLO, 0130, Germany.

Email: e.m.stambol@jus.uio.no

dynamics. This article seeks to contribute to the nascent research literature on multipolar security provision in Africa by addressing two research gaps, one empirical and one theoretical.

The empirical research gap is mainly geographical. While scholars have increasingly brought attention to how and why China, Russia, Turkey, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia engage in East and South Africa, and influence local security dynamics (Chegraoui et al., 2020; Kabandula and Shaw, 2018), their roles in the Sahel and West Africa have received little attention (except for short policy analysis op-eds; see, for example, Armstrong, 2021; Gbadamosi, 2022; Lacher, 2022; Özkan and Kanté, 2022). Yet, with shifting regimes, including several military coups, and the withdrawal of European interventions from Mali, other external influences can play important roles in security provision that might redraw regional political landscapes and shape emerging orders. In this article, we focus on the UAE and Turkey to move beyond a focus on great powers and the BRICS in the making of Sahelian (in)security, and to explore more subtle forms of trans- and interregional connections.¹ While they are frequently reported upon in African, Middle Eastern, and European media outlets,² scholarly discourse has so far paid little attention to the activities of these actors, whose connections with the Sahel we take as starting point for our theoretical argument.

Theoretically, we address ongoing debates in critical security studies about how this multipolarity and the shifting security landscapes alter our understanding of processes of (in)securitization in general and in the Sahel in particular. Critical security studies scholars have enhanced our understanding of these processes by analyzing the production of Sahelian (in)securities in powerful Western intervention discourses (Lacher, 2008). In line with the ‘local turn’ (Mac Ginty, 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013), fine-grained studies of local security agency in the Sahel have also revealed multiple agendas that sometimes align with and other times contrast to Western security interests (Balduino, 2020; Bøås, 2015; Charbonneau and Sears, 2014; Cold-Ravnkilde, 2021; Raineri and Strazzari, 2019). The resulting multiplicity and heterogeneity of actors, practices, rationalities, and technologies have been productively theorized as (in)security assemblages (Frowd, 2018; Frowd and Sandor, 2018; Sandor, 2016). Assemblage theory has two notable strengths: it allows for analyzing a multitude of mutually constitutive relationships that shape (in)securitization (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011) and is particularly suited for analyzing the emergence of new orders and the erosion of old ones (Bueger, 2018). However, we argue that owing to the empirical focus on either Western intervention or local security agency, the potential of these strengths of the theory has not yet been fully realized in scholarship on Sahelian (in)security. While building on this scholarship, we introduce the notion of transnational security entanglements to move beyond the predominant focus on either Western interventions or local security agency. Bringing the literature on (in)security assemblages into dialogue with accounts of transnational entanglements as they have been advanced in adjacent disciplines, we argue that (a) contemporary transformations of political orders in the Sahel need to be understood against the backdrop of their linkages beyond the West and (b) that these transregional linkages require a specific analytic to be brought to the fore.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the literatures on Sahelian (in)security, decentering critical security studies, and ‘emerging powers’ in Africa. The third section outlines our conceptual framework centered around the notion of ‘transnational security entanglements’ and how it adds analytical value to theory on (in)security assemblages. The fourth section lays out how transnational entanglements can be studied empirically and how we did this practically in our research methods. The fifth and sixth sections detail the UAE’s and Turkey’s transnational entanglements with the Sahel region. The seventh section engages the insights from these empirical observations in a discussion of the concept of transnational security entanglements and provides conclusionary remarks.

The Saharan security threat, global circulation, and emerging powers in Africa

Since the early 2000s, the Sahel region of West Africa has come increasingly to be seen by Western countries as the epicenter of a ‘political economy of danger’: security knowledge initially generated through US intelligence made risks connected to terrorism and transnational crime legible and thereby discursively produced the very security threats that surveillance meant to detect – simultaneously rendering them objects of Western security governance (Lacher, 2008). Much in line with threat conceptions at the time and the broadening of the security threat catalogue after Cold War bipolarity, Sahelian security threats were conceptualized in Western policy discourse and responses as ‘illicit flows’ (Castells, 2010; Stambøl, 2021). ‘Weak’ or ‘fragile’ states with ‘ungoverned spaces’ and ‘porous borders’ came to be seen as causes of such ‘bad global circulation’ of terrorists, transnational criminals, and irregular migrants – in short, the shadow side of the global economy (Duffield, 2013). As a result of this securitization, political orders in the Sahel have come to be shaped by ‘counterinsurgency governance’ and a permanent state of intervention (Charbonneau, 2021).

Yet, far from being subject to a coherent regime of control, argues Lacher (2008: 385), securitization of the Sahel came about through a ‘heterogeneous and spontaneous process of “actually existing security”’: various public (e.g. states and international organizations) and private actors (e.g. media, intelligence companies and risk consultancies, academia, and development organizations) engaged in a struggle over the discursive production of the Sahel as a security threat. Each actor had its own stakes and interests in this discursive production that shaped it in decisive yet little uniform ways. A compatible conceptualization, yet one that is focused more on security practices than on discourse, has been furthered through the lens of ‘assemblages of (in)security’, focusing on ‘the heterogeneous mix of global and local actors, and often contradictory rationalities and practices that shape the logics of symbolic and martial violence in the region’ (Frowd and Sandor, 2018: 70; see also Frowd, 2018). Importantly, these (in)security assemblages also include a variety of regional and local actors, rationalities, and practices.

In quests to ‘decolonize’ or ‘decenter’ international relations and critical security studies (Acharya and Buzan, 2017; Bilgin, 2011, 2016; Sabaratnam, 2017), scholars have pointed to the importance of local agency in the appropriation of as well as resistance to the imposition of Western models (Mac Ginty, 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013). In the context of the Sahel, several studies have broadened the perspective of the Saharan ‘political economy of danger’ as produced not only by Western power/knowledge by bringing in valuable local perspectives (Baldaro, 2020; Raineri, 2022). Especially contributions from anthropology, area studies, and peace and conflict studies show the complexity of so-called local agency, where different actors may have a variety of agendas and security interests (e.g. Bøås, 2015; Lecocq, 2013). For example, Baldaro (2020) explores security region-building in the Sahel from three different local perspectives – armed Islamist groups, political elites, and local populations – showing that the first views the West as the security threat, the second uses security-focused regional organization-building (G5 Sahel) to ensure regime security through extracting rents from international aid, while, for the third, regional circulation and mobility are crucial for securing livelihoods. Some of these agendas are aligned, while others conflict with Western interventions, and studies have shown that if Western interveners are not mindful of local contexts, ‘hybrid security governance’ and patronage politics may become entrenched, rather than ‘democratized’, through Western security assistance (Raineri and Strazzari, 2019). Such in-depth and ethnographic studies are crucial for understanding various contexts, as well as for concept-building ‘from the periphery’ (Hönke and Müller, 2012). However, we also argue that this is not sufficient, as the local perspective gives too little attention to

transnational entanglements other than with the West – and therefore misses crucial aspects of the making of (in)security in the Sahel. We therefore turn our attention to other actors than the usual Western suspects or their local beneficiaries.

The past years have seen a rapidly growing interest in ‘emerging’, ‘rising’, or ‘new’ powers in Africa. Often focusing on a few select actors (such as China, India, or Brazil) operating in specific contexts (mainly East or Southern Africa), this literature emphasizes these actors’ newness as powerful players in Africa. In the following, we go beyond the focus on ‘great powers’ and the ‘BRICS’. Smaller actors like the Gulf states and Turkey in Africa have been subject to some studies, yet almost exclusively in East and Southern Africa (Berger and Eickhoff, 2022; Donelli and Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021; Heibach, 2020). They are often portrayed as strategic actors who engage in Africa to increase their power and prestige on the world stage, in stark competition also with each other (Turkey/Qatar against Saudi Arabia/UAE against Iran). The Gulf states, which in recent years have multiplied their investments, diplomatic ties, and logistics routes, are seen to engage in East Africa to secure victory in their war in Yemen, ensure domestic food security, and counter Qatar’s, Iran’s, and occasionally Turkey’s engagement in Africa (Heibach, 2020; Todman, 2018). While the UAE has become one of the world’s largest humanitarian donors, in particular its corporate maritime diplomacy and sea infrastructure that furnishes routes for trade and the transport of humanitarian aid, as well as security personnel and equipment, have been conceptualized as expressing a form of ‘circulating power’ (Ziadah, 2019a). Also, Turkey’s engagement since its strategic foreign policy decision of ‘opening to Africa’ in 2005 has encompassed the exponential growth of investments, trade volume, diplomatic ties, and transport infrastructure (Heibach and Taş, n.d.). Scholars have interpreted Turkey, on the one hand, as a unique needs-driven and counter-colonial aid donor different from both OECD DAC countries or China (Belder and Dipama, 2018; Donelli, 2018; Özkan and Akgün, 2010) and, on the other, as on a ‘neo-Ottoman’, nationalist, normative, and moral quest to carve out a new foreign policy identity for itself as a ‘virtuous power’ in contrast to the European imperial ‘Other’ (Langan, 2017). Still, the literatures on the Gulf states and Turkey have largely ignored their engagement in West Africa. Security, moreover, has tended to be interpreted through the binary soft or hard. In the following, we suggest a different conceptual framework for how these actors’ security engagement can be understood.

Transnational entanglements and Sahelian (in)security assemblages

Assemblage theory has become a productive analytical lens through which to study Sahelian (in)security (Frowd, 2018; Frowd and Sandor, 2018; Sandor, 2016). Assemblages are composed of various types of security actors like ‘police, military, developmental, diplomatic, informal, illicit, etc. . . . representing diverse scales of political action, cooperating and competing over their diverse threat framings and appropriate security responses’ (Frowd and Sandor, 2018: 73–74). The focus of analysis is on how actors and objects *do* security and how heterogeneous security knowledges and practices are assembled together to produce an emerging order, thereby usually situating this theory within a broader practice turn (Bueger and Gadinger, 2015). The relational power of the assemblage is that of (un)bundling actors and objects, and it is ‘open to complex and distributed causality’ (Frowd, 2018: 48). One of its strengths is therefore attention to sociotechnical arrangements and material objects. As nodes in the assemblage, actors and objects draw into play a comprehensive set of relations ‘underpinned by shifting connections between actors and the forms of security knowledge they bring with them’ (Frowd, 2018: 49–50). This means that various security devices, technologies, and infrastructures play their own role in Sahelian (in)security assemblages.

However, while one of the strengths of assemblage theory is precisely its potential for analyzing a broad variety of heterogeneous and contradictory actors, objects, practices, and rationalities and how they are assembled together to cohere and form a distinct type of order (Bueger, 2018: 618), we argue that this potential of the theory has not yet been fully realized in scholarship on Sahelian (in)security. Studying more closely the empirical uses of assemblage theory with regard to Sahelian (in)security reveals why: scholars have focused mostly either on Western interveners of different kinds (e.g. the French military operations, security professionals from UN and EU missions, NGOs, development actors, researchers) or on a variety of local actors (e.g. state actors, security professionals, smugglers, armed groups, migrants) or security objects (mostly European border security technologies, boats, police vehicles, and so on). However, these are not the only actors or objects that are part of Sahelian (in)security assemblages: indeed, a range of transnational entanglements – which bring with them other actors, objects, practices, ideas, and rationalities from other parts of the world than Europe and Africa – are missing from this analysis. Still, these transnational entanglements shape the Sahelian (in)security assemblage in subtle yet unignorable ways – because they influence what kind of orders are emerging in the Sahel. In the following, we therefore bring the literature on Sahelian (in)security assemblages into dialogue with scholarship on transnational entanglements.

The notion of entanglement has recently gained prominence across the humanities and social sciences, yet its usage often remains metaphorical as the precise conceptual contours remain underspecified. Developed initially within the academic field of history, the notion of ‘entanglements’ was directed against the supremacy of methodological nationalism underpinning both the analyses of individual cases and comparative approaches (Werner and Zimmermann, 2006). Criticizing tacit assumptions about the autonomy and teleology of historical developments, entangled histories focused instead on the complex movements of ‘people, ideas, and things across boundaries’ (Conrad, 2016: 42). More recently, the concept of entanglement has been mobilized in legal scholarship to question the seeming self-reliance of national law and to, instead, show its deep imbrications in ‘heavily overlapping, mutually connected and openly extended institutions, norms and processes’ (Walker, 2015: 16). The concept of entanglement has been successfully mobilized to open rigid analytical categories for more transnational perspectives that emphasize how ‘the domestic’ and ‘the international’ are deeply intertwined (Berger, 2021; Krisch, 2021).

In the field of security studies, Barkawi and Laffey (2006: 329) refer to entangled securities to advance the argument that understanding ‘security relations, past and present, requires acknowledging the mutual constitution of European and non-European worlds and their joint role in making history’. Similarly, Hönke and Müller (2012) also highlight the mutually constitutive effects of South–North encounters. Deeply unequal power relations notwithstanding, encounters between colonizers and colonized (or between postcolonial states at the periphery and powerful states in the Global North) are not unidirectional but significantly shape the actions of Western states. Drawing on the example of the emergence of modern policing, they show how modern French and British policing practices did not emerge in isolation but were inseparably intertwined with experimentation in colonial policing practices across the British and French empires.

However, nearly all of these conceptual developments of entanglements have – just like studies on Sahelian (in)security assemblages – focused on the entanglements between the West and the ‘non-West’, or between the Global North and the Global South. While calls have been made for more attention to South–South security entanglements (Hönke and Müller, 2016), few contributions have answered the call, examples being Tickner (2016) on Colombia as a security exporter to the Global South, Müller and Steinke (2020) on Brazilian peacekeepers in Haiti, or the Beirut School of Critical Security Studies, whose goal it is to study local people’s lived experiences of (in)security and to ‘speak from the [Middle Eastern] region not just for the region, but for the rest

of the world' (Abboud et al., 2018: 284). Yet also these important contributions on South–South security entanglements seem to reproduce the confines of area/regional studies, while *transregional* connections have received less attention (but see, for example, Amar, 2013). In the following, we argue that transnational entanglements – other than with the West – are the elements missing from analyses on Sahelian (in)security assemblages that are crucial for analyses of the political orders currently emerging in the Sahel.

So how does the notion of transnational entanglement relate to that of the global (in)security assemblage? We argue that the literatures on entanglements and assemblages, which have largely stood in isolation from each other, can be brought into productive dialogue. They share some key arguments: First, they both eschew the methodological nationalism underpinning a lot of social science research on conflicts and political transformations more generally. Rather than accepting the modern nation-state as a meaningful unit of analysis, they embark on open inquiries into the connections that brought specific social and political phenomena into being. Second, they both stress the importance of connections between human and non-human entities. While differing in the degree of agency accredited to the non-human (with Latourian Actor Network Theory being the most expansive), both assemblage and entanglement approaches emphasize the ways in which social worlds are not just human-made. Third, while emphasizing the importance of material artifacts, they are both grounded in relational ontologies that are 'wary of fixations and reifications . . . and see the world instead in terms of the processes through which things become the way they are' (Guzzini, 2017: 367). Assemblages and entanglements are thus inherently instable, constantly emergent, and always in process (Lisle, 2021).

In light of these similarities, Debbie Lisle (2021: 440) has recently argued that assemblages and entanglements might be productively thought of in a hierarchical relationship in which 'an assemblage is the overarching "thing" that is made up of a multitude of different entanglements between actors'. In this reading, assemblages are constituted by multiple and often overlapping entanglements. We argue that, in connecting disparate assemblages, transnational entanglements are what make the assemblage multi-sited, multi-scalar, global, and infinite. In the following, however, we would like to give a more specific meaning to the notion of entanglements. Drawing on the scholarship on entangled histories outlined above, we conceptualize entanglements as those relations that connect different actors (and the assemblages within which they are embedded) across North and South divides or within the South but across different regions. Entanglements are therefore specific connections between different assemblages. While assemblages are historically and geographically specific (albeit in contingent and contested ways), they also 'branch out of particular security-centred spaces' (Sandor, 2016: 83) like the Sahel. It is this process of branching out beyond the North Atlantic that we focus on.

Our account of entangled (in)securities therefore builds on assemblage theorizing and the myriad ways in which it has advanced our understanding of emergent political orders in the Sahel. These have been conceptualized as 'hybrid' (Raineri and Strazzari, 2019) or 'heterarchical' (Hüsken and Klute, 2015), marked by blurry demarcations and shared sovereignty between state and non-state actors; they are 'fluctuating, entangling and disentangling' (Hüsken and Klute, 2015: 324) and 'complex, often kaleidoscopic political configurations that have shifted away from any aspiration to be monopolizing systems of governance and patronage and can best be understood as a multitude of shifting alliances due to competition among networks of patronage' (Bøås and Strazzari, 2020: 11). While these networks of patronage are unavoidably transnational, their composition has recently started to change. With the withdrawal of European interventions from Mali, Bøås and Strazzari have noted that a new plurality of rent-seeking opportunities has become available. These include new material and ideological resources like religious education, political Islam, and 'the pervasive presence of investments and aid from China, Turkey, the Gulf countries and

Russia' (Bøås and Strazzari, 2020: 6). They broaden local elites' room for maneuver vis-a-vis Western powers and multilateral organizations and have far-reaching consequences for the calculations of incumbents, insurgents, and potential coup leaders (Lacher, 2022). In other words, transnational entanglements with other parts of the world than Europe, such as the ones we analyze in this article, seem to play an increasingly important role in the Sahelian (in)security assemblages and political orders currently in the making.

Exploring transnational entanglements empirically

As components of and connections between various (in)security assemblages, transnational entanglements 'can be described along a spectrum: from a purely material role at one extreme of the axis to a purely expressive role at the other extreme' (Bueger, 2018: 621). Entanglements can be material and ideational; they can be actors, objects, and devices; and they can live lives of their own and attain new roles in different political orders and organizing logics (Sandor, 2016). Our empirical undertaking has therefore been to map out and trace the variety of transnational entanglements between the UAE, Turkey, and the Sahel countries along this spectrum from purely material to ideational and discursive entanglements, following three data-gathering steps.

The first research phase entailed broad Internet searches about the UAE and Turkey in the Sahel and included gathering information from Sahelian, Middle Eastern, and European media outlets and grey literature (typically policy briefs and reports from various research institutes), mainly in English and French. This resulted in a list mapping all events and activities we could find, such as diplomatic visits, signings of bilateral agreements, common summits and statements, trade relations, aid flows, construction projects, sales of arms and security equipment, etc. In other words, it was a mapping of the materiality and infrastructure of these transregional connections.

The second step was to explore how these connections and events were narrated and mobilized discursively by high-level political figures, especially in the security discourse on the Sahel in the UAE and Turkey. For the UAE, this was done mainly through analyzing all articles related to 'Sahel' and Sahel-countries (142 reports) of the Emirates News Agency.³ This web page reports on the official activities and speeches of Emirati government figures in English, something that means that it is targeting an English-speaking and probably Western audience. For Turkey, especially the official page of the Presidency of Turkey was consulted, which contains speeches and statements of the Turkish government and is, like the Emirati page, an English-language page.⁴ Additionally, Turkish pro-government media like *Hürriyet Daily News* often quote the speeches of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and other government figures, and tends to reproduce the official Turkish government discourse on the Sahel.

The third phase was to explore the above-described material, infrastructural, discursive, and ideational connections further, verify or falsify the media reports, and discuss, understand, and interpret discourses and engagement through the conduct of interviews. This was arguably the most challenging step as it took place between March and June 2021 amid a Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and travel restrictions that inhibited fieldwork. While more than 60 people were contacted repeatedly (through email, phone, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.), 12 interviews could finally be carried out virtually (through Skype, Teams, Zoom or by phone). These included Sahelian, Turkish, and Emirati foreign policy, humanitarian, and logistics professionals (i.e. not official ministerial representatives but people working in public and semi-public-private sectors like humanitarian organizations and logistics enterprises from these countries, some of whom had held formal professional foreign policy positions), as well as some researchers and journalists observing the UAE, Turkey, or the Sahel. Additionally, several informal conversations were conducted with researcher

and journalist colleagues who had more recently been on fieldwork in the Sahel and could therefore tell about what they had observed regarding the UAE's and Turkey's engagement.

On the basis of this empirical data-gathering, which cannot be seen as an exhaustive mapping of all transnational entanglements between the Sahel, the UAE, and Turkey, we present some of the transregional connections that shape the contours of emergent orders in the Sahel. On the one hand, quotidian material infrastructures have crucial importance for the constitution of global politics, and the focus is then on the artifacts by which these actors become entangled (Salter, 2015, 2016). In our research, we focus on the materiality of transport infrastructures and logistics as sites where entanglements between geographically dispersed actors emerged. As our analysis will show, infrastructure serves multiple purposes that blur the distinction between trade, humanitarianism, and security – thereby nuancing the concept of security (Ziadah, 2019a). On the other hand, ideational entanglements encompass elements such as shared beliefs, norms, and religion, which are mobilized by the UAE and Turkey through their foreign policies. Military entanglements are tied in with the material and ideational connections like security practices and infrastructures, as well as ideas and discourses about what security is. Our focus in the following is on disentangling the multiplicity of these transnational entanglements, while noting that it must be up to future studies – preferably with the possibility of immersive fieldwork – to explore more in-depth how the entanglements identified in this article are playing into and (re)shaping Sahelian (in)security assemblages and the new orders currently emerging.

The United Arab Emirates and West Africa/the Sahel

The entanglements of the UAE with the Sahel and West Africa more broadly follow a multiplicity of interconnected types and dimensions: from material to discursive, ideational, and symbolic.

Infrastructural power, humanitarian aid, and the symbolic effects of Dubai modernism

The UAE's trade with Sahelian countries has risen over the past decade, from \$2 billion in 2009 to \$10 billion in 2019 (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2020b). In comparison, for example, Germany's trade with Sahelian countries totaled \$6 billion in 2019 (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2020a). The UAE's current major economic investments in West Africa are, as in East Africa, centered around logistics infrastructure – which connects this region to transnational circuits of South–South trade and circulation. In 2014, the UAE announced \$19 billion worth of investments in West African infrastructure (roads, railways, airports, ports, power plants, and water facilities) entailing public–private partnerships furthered through, among other channels, the West Africa Investment Forum in Dubai (Fahy, 2014).

One prominent expression of the UAE's 'infrastructural power' (Khalili, 2018) is the state-owned company Dubai Ports World (DP World), which owns 77 ports around the world and increasingly engages not only in the East but also in West Africa. In 2018, the company announced its largest-ever investment in an African country: \$837 million to develop and operate the 300-hectare container terminal and to finance, design, and develop the land and maritime infrastructure of the new 600-hectare port in the Dakar port of Ndayane (DP World, 2020b). This also represents the largest single external investment in Senegal's history (Interview 1). While DP World has, since 2008, operated the 30-hectare Bargny Sendou port of Dakar, the new port entails a significant expansion. Although the size of this investment is astonishing, the two Dakar ports are the only big Emirati port projects in West Africa, as it has more ports in East and South Africa. In comparison, French company Bolloré is present in 42 ports across Africa and has 18 West African container terminal

concessions, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, and Guinea-Conakry (Bolloré, 2022; Weir, 2021). In addition to the container terminal, the Emirati port will include an economic free zone to attract investments – meaning an extra-territorial zone with no customs duties, modeled after the port of Dubai (Interview 1). As argued by Hönke (2018) in her analysis of the Dar and Bagamoyo ports in Tanzania, new investors such as China and the Gulf states invoke new and more diverse imaginaries of modernity to which African ports become gateways. In the case of the Dakar ports, Senegalese authorities have been particularly attracted to the Emirati model of boosting South–South trade, becoming one of the first members of DP World's 'World Logistics Passport' that enables the opening of new markets through connecting business partners in South Asia, Africa, and South and Central America (thus explicitly omitting the West) to 'overcome trade impediments, such as logistics inefficiency, that currently limit the growth of trade between developing markets' (DP World, 2020a). Around the port thus emerges a variety of new circuits of transnational South–South circulation and entanglements.

The Dakar ports will also be connected to a network of new inland trade infrastructure in the Sahel region built and overseen by Emirati state-owned companies, notably DP World. Located strategically on the main road and railway line from Dakar through Kati to Bamako, DP World is currently building a multimodal logistics platform. This 1000-hectare (10 km²) logistics and shipping hub will have inland container depots and container freight stations to facilitate the import and export of goods (Logistics Update Africa, 2018). When opened, the platform – and DP World, which has signed a 20-year concession with an automatic 20-year extension to build and operate the hub – will control and manage all cargo coming into Mali from Senegal (Interviews 1 and 3). Malian media have reported that the opening of the new logistics hub will have crucial consequences for the security, safety, health, and well-being of the citizens of Bamako, as well as the general functionality of the town (Bomboté, 2020). The warehouses contained at the logistics platform will also be able to store development and humanitarian aid provided to Mali both by the UAE and by Western actors (Interview 1), like the logistics hubs in Dubai (Ziadah, 2019a). Indeed, Dubai International Humanitarian City is the world's largest humanitarian logistics hub, hosting the stockpiles of the UN and various NGOs (Ziadah, 2019a), and Emirati transport logistics have been instrumental in distributing UNHCR humanitarian aid to refugees and internally displaced people as well as WHO Covid-19 equipment to Sahelian countries (Emirates News Agency, 2020b). Accordingly, the Sahel infrastructure forms part of a broader Emirati foreign policy role as a 'circulating power' (Ziadah, 2019a).

The UAE's logistics infrastructure thus merges neoliberal South–South trade with development/humanitarianism and security (Ziadah, 2019a). The UAE's aid to the Sahel through the Abu Dhabi Development Fund has grown. For example, Mauritania, which has had close ties with the UAE since the 1970s, is to receive Emirati development and investment projects worth \$2 billion (Alsaia, 2020), and the country's largest donor in 2018–2019 was the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (OECD, 2020). The EU, in comparison, has provided \$378 million to Mauritania in development cooperation in the period from 2014 to 2020 (European Commission, 2020). Dubai-style towers have been built in Nouakchott, interpreted locally as symbols of Arab modernism, inter-Arab cultural exchange, and success (Choplin, 2010). In line with the state–corporate nature seemingly characteristic of Emirati engagement, we find that DP World is building wells and solar panels, providing school equipment, and distributing food during Ramadan and Covid-19 equipment during the pandemic in the African countries where it engages, and its staff do volunteer work in African communities (Interview 2; DP World Middle East & Africa, 2020). Moreover, the Emirati government has proved to be an important distributor of Covid-19 equipment throughout the world, and Emirati logistics infrastructure (notably DP World and Abu Dhabi Ports) has been mobilized in its Covid-19 diplomacy to ensure health security around the world

(United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2021) – including to the Sahel, where it has distributed six metric tons of medical supplies both to Mali and to Niger (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2020a, 2020b).

Emirati–Sahelian military entanglements

In 2017, Abu Dhabi pledged \$35 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force to fight terrorism and transnational crime, and will, together with Saudi Arabia, which pledged \$100 million, support the Sahel countries with training, intelligence, and logistical support, supposedly partly through the Riyadh-based Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) (Alkhereiji, 2017). An additional \$20 million was reportedly pledged by the UAE to the G5 Sahel in early 2020 in a military and diplomatic offensive to forge closer military ties with various Sahelian capitals (*Africa Intelligence*, 2020a). In comparison, the EU and its member-states provided €147 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force as of July 2019 (European External Action Service, 2019). The UAE established a military academy in Mauritania in 2016, the Mohammed bin Zayed Defense College, to train senior officers from all of the G5 Sahel countries (Ardemagni, 2020), and, according to a Sahel researcher,⁵ has been instrumental in developing Mauritania's counter-radicalization strategy. Additionally, the UAE's Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces, signed a military cooperation agreement (alongside other agreements on economics, trade, and culture) with the Malian government in May 2018 (Martin, 2020). The agreement was reportedly complementary to the training cooperation in Mauritania with the G5 Sahel (Interview 4). Indeed, the UAE has proved to be an increasing security equipment supplier across Africa, and in January 2020 it was reportedly to donate 30 Cougar armored vehicles to Mali and sell 100 more (Martin, 2020). Researchers of Emirati security policies note that the UAE's increasingly proactive, security-driven foreign policy is propelled in part by a growing domestic military industry, including the establishment of international security training and education hubs inside and outside the UAE for security forces and police around the world (Ardemagni, 2020; Marshall, 2017, 2021). This suggests that the security industry might be one driver of Emirati foreign policy in West Africa.

The deep intertwinement between Emirati and Western security interests has consequences for Sahelian (in)security. For example, according to *Africa Intelligence* (2021), one third of the \$35 million pledged by the UAE to the G5 Sahel Joint Force in the first round (which was the amount of money that actually materialized and was channeled to the G5 Sahel Trust Fund) reportedly went to French security companies to purchase 80 Arqus armored vehicles. Similarly, the €100 million pledged by Saudi Arabia on 5 December 2018 (but that never materialized) were reportedly promised not to the G5 Sahel governments but directly to Admiral Édouard Guillaud, who at that time was the head of the French military exports company Office Français d'Exportation d'Armement (ODAS) (Afrique, 2020). Thus, the UAE is co-constitutive of the material underpinnings of the Western security threat production in the Sahel. Yet also the Western problematization and narration of the Sahelian security threat as terrorism requiring military intervention and stabilization is repeatedly supported by Emirati discourse, mainly in official communication by Emirati ministers and members of the royal family.⁶ The Emirati objectives in the Sahel, as expressed by Emirati Minister of State Sheikh Shakhbout bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, are 'fighting terrorism and ending extremism in the Sahel, . . . continu[ing] support for developmental and humanitarian programs . . . , curb[ing] extremism in all its manifestations and restor[ing] security and stability in the region' (Emirates News Agency, 2021a). Indeed, the word pair 'security and stability' appears several times in almost every single official Emirati statement about the Sahel, less frequently accompanied by 'development', 'prosperity', 'peace', and 'Covid-19'.

Ideationally, the UAE discursively reiterates its fight against extreme interpretations of Islam and emphasizes its goal of spreading moderate and modern versions of Islam. It does so through engaging with Sahelian Islamic scholars, ministers, religious leaders, and heads of Islamic universities in the region's countries, through, among other channels, the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies held in cooperation with the Mauritanian government, which seeks to 'facilitate the movement of the continent's scholars, to counter violent extremism and civil wars in the region' (Emirates News Agency, 2020a). The UAE's problematization of terrorism, terrorism financing, and extremism has encompassed Daesh, Iran, the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and political Islam (and Qatar during the blockade), which are seen by the UAE as disrupting security and stability (Ziadah, 2019b). According to Ziadah (2019b), stability for the Gulf states entails *regime* stability, something that especially became a foreign policy objective during and after the Arab Spring. In the Sahel context, Abu Dhabi (like France) strongly condemned the murder of long-time autocratic Chadian President Idriss Déby in April 2021 as a 'cowardly act against a brave friend who has worked sincerely over the past decades for the sake of the stability and prosperity of his country' (Emirates News Agency, 2021b). Accordingly, the Emirati terrorism conception in the Sahel has expanded to encompass the rebels allegedly crossing into Chad from Libya said to have killed Déby. This provided the impetus for, first on 24 April 2021, boosting cooperation against terrorism in the Sahel between the UAE and Egypt, and, second, on 25 April 2021, Emirati support of the French military operation Barkhane with humanitarian logistics flights. Emirati entanglements in the Sahel therefore emerge as both deliberate foreign policy strategies aimed at building security alliances (mainly with the West) and as the result of business conglomerates seeking lucrative investment opportunities and thereby projecting 'circulating power' beyond the West.

Turkey and West Africa/the Sahel

Ideational entanglements and material connections, and especially aerial infrastructures, military cooperation, and arms exports, also emerge from Turkish interactions with multiple Sahelian actors.

(Corporate) infrastructure, local political ties, development, and reinvocation of Ottoman imaginaries

Turkey's entanglements with the Sahel were reinvigorated around 2013 and intensified with Erdogan's visits to Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal in 2018. Turkey spent \$61 million in aid in the Sahel between 2014 and 2019, which however pales in comparison to the amount of aid provided by the EU and its member-states, who have spent \$8 billion since 2014 (Armstrong, 2021). Trade also increased: for example, trade between Turkey and Mali increased tenfold from \$5 million in 2003 to \$57 million in 2019. In comparison, trade between the EU and Mali was \$1 billion in 2019 (European Commission, 2022). Yet unlike the UAE, Turkey seems to be much more present and visible on the ground.

Observers of Sahelian politics and society consulted by the authors say that they have noticed lots of visible Turkish activities in the Sahel, especially in Niger and particularly large-scale infrastructure and construction projects. Most noticeable is the construction of Niamey's new Diori-Hamani Airport by the Turkish Summa group connected to Erdogan, as well as the new Radisson Blu hotel finished for the occasion of the African Union (AU) Summit in July 2019.⁷ Just as the Emirati are creating new channels for sea circulation, airports and air routes are a Turkish specialty, as Turkey has also built and is assigned to operate the new Blaise Diagne airport of Dakar (a \$575 million investment) and is building the airport of Khartoum, Sudan, in addition to a new airport

terminal in Tripoli, Libya (*Daily Sabah*, 2021). Furnishing crucial circuits of transnational circulation beyond Europe, and especially between Turkey and the Sahel, Turkish Airlines has established almost daily flights to Niamey. Indeed, according to Heibach and Taş (n.d.) and their dataset on Turkey in Africa,⁸ new Turkish Airlines routes tend to follow in the wake of Turkish establishment of a diplomatic representation to an African country, totaling 33 routes to 60 African destinations in 2020, including newly launched direct Turkish Airlines flights from Istanbul to Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou (Armstrong, 2021). In comparison, Air France served 35 African destinations in 2020 and has established flights to Niamey at a slightly reduced frequency compared with Turkish Airlines (Air France, 2019).

Somewhat different from Emirati engagement, Turkey–Sahel entanglements go beyond official state-level diplomatic visits or big investments, to thorough engagement with politics, business, and logistics on a local level. For example, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) (which has had an office in Niger since 2013) renovated the Grand Mosque and the palace of the Sultanate of Agadez in northern Niger, as well as the gold-mining town of Djado close to the borders with Libya and Algeria.⁹ In fact, the restoration of Ottoman towns, buildings, and mosques is something Turkey is doing across Africa and elsewhere, supporting its ideational narratives about historical ties and Islamic unity, as we will show in later sections. According to former TIKA staff, such local political connections are typical for how TIKA operates, in close consultation with local-level authorities (Interview 5). The Turkish ambassador to Niger, Türker Ari, is frequently depicted on his Twitter account meeting a variety of local leaders and businessmen, and according to *Africa Intelligence* he has regular meetings with Association Islamique du Niger and the Turkish–Nigerien friendship group in the Nigerien parliament (*Africa Intelligence*, 2020b; see also Agence Nigérienne de Presse, 2020).

With regard to Mali, analysts have asserted that the coup d'état in Mali on 18 August 2020 'offered a powerful motive for Ankara to expand its activities in West Africa' (Özkan, 2020). Turkey was among the first states (after Russia) to endorse the military coup against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta when Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu met with the National Committee for the Salvation of the People on 9 September 2020, three weeks after the coup (Ramani, 2020). According to *Africa Intelligence*, this visit also served the purpose of consolidating Turkish industrial projects in the country (*Africa Intelligence*, 2020c). Turkey has also reportedly built a mosque for the High Islamic Council of Mali and rehabilitated another mosque in former President Keïta's hometown (Armstrong, 2021). Highlighting Turkish involvement in Malian infrastructure, Turkish company Kalyon Insaat was contracted (\$120 million) for the construction of an 18-stop bus rapid transit line in Bamako (Heibach and Taş, n.d.).

In addition to infrastructure and construction, Turkish cooperation with Sahelian countries predominantly revolves around humanitarian and development aid – or what interviewees refer to as 'soft security' (Interview 6; see also Armstrong, 2021). The latter is disbursed through organizations operating somewhat independently yet closely connected to the Turkish state, such as the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) – which, among other things, engages in healthcare and has done a great amount of cataract operations across Africa (Interview 7). Turkey has also built and is operating hospitals in Mali and Niger, and has provided Covid-19 equipment and treatment in part through these hospitals. For example, in June 2020, Turkey granted a donation of Covid-19 equipment to Niger and Chad as 'a gesture of friendship and goodwill' (Aydoğan-Ağlarci, 2020). Moreover, apart from offering scholarships for Sahelian students wishing to study in Turkey, Turkey provides both secular and religious education through schools ran by the Maarif Foundation, which has taken over Gülenist schools across the Sahel countries after 2016. Blurring development, education, and security, the purging and takeover of Gülenist infrastructure is an important expression of the external dimension of Turkey's internal security and an important security imperative in Turkish

engagement with African countries, motivated by domestic regime security – making Turkey’s cooperation conditional upon the cutting of Gülenist ties (Heibach and Taş, n.d.).

Turkish–Sahelian military entanglements

Turkey has a variety of military entanglements with Sahelian countries, some of which are expressions of distinctly Turkish security imperatives, while others either support or oppose Western-led security interventions and discourses.

On the one hand, and like the UAE, Turkey supports interventions that are central to Western actors: contributing to the budget of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), deploying two police officers to the mission (Demirci and Çolakoğlu, 2020), and pledging \$5 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2018 (Ramani, 2020). On the other hand, analysts and media tend to present Turkey as strongly opposed to French counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel.¹⁰ This Sahel discourse is part of a broader Turkish narrative on Africa that counters Western interventionism and the prescription and imposition of Western (security) policy models and solutions (Çapan and Zarakol, 2017) and as such expresses a broader Turkish foreign policy strategy. For example, during former Burkinabe President Roch Kaboré’s visit to Turkey in April 2019, Erdogan stated: ‘The ostracizing, conceited and intervening behaviors towards African countries have no value to us. Our African friends have more than enough experience to produce solutions for their own problems within the framework of their own values, sensitivities and dynamics’ (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2019). In contrast, Turkey presents its own security engagement as anti-colonial, and Erdogan discursively emphasizes African countries’ and Turkey’s common history, religion, and experiences with terrorism as a ground for stronger cooperation on counter-terrorism (Abdelkerim Idriss, 2020). In fact, the Turkish discourse simultaneously mobilizes Ottoman imperial history in Africa *and* portrays Turkey as anti-colonial in its appeal to African countries’ sense of commonality and shared beliefs; as Erdogan expressed: ‘Thank Allah, we are the only nation who had ruled over such a vast geography and, still, has no stain of colonialism in its history or no trace of atrocity resulting from colonialism’ (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2017).¹¹ This also underscores the role Erdogan is attempting to mold for himself as a leading figure of the Muslim world.¹² Sahelian leaders seem rather keen to embrace Turkish cooperation, and, according to the Turkish presidency, former Malian President Keïta stated in a meeting with Erdogan that ‘there was indeed a need for a leader who would make himself heard and show his leadership in the Islamic World. Now, this voice is being heard. We stand by him and will act in solidarity for Turkey and for the world. Mr. Erdogan, yours is an honorable cause, we know that it is not an egotistical cause’ (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018b). In a region where anti-colonial sentiments are growing in tandem with the prolongation of European (and especially French) military presence, the Turkish anti-colonial narrative and alternative security provision may find fertile ground (see Langan, 2017). There have lately been growing calls for alternatives to Western security provision across the region, especially from Russia (Whitehouse, 2021).

Both Western and Emirati media have to some extent portrayed the growing Turkish engagement in the Sahel as somewhat threatening to the region. However, Turkish interviewees emphasize that Turkey is not engaging in the Sahel to counter France or the UAE, as is often purported in the press, but rather owing to its own interests (Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean) and the security interests of Sahelian countries (Interviews 5, 6 and 7). Turkish military relations with Sahelian countries are mainly bilateral, and Turkey has concluded military and security cooperation agreements with Niger (2020, 2013), Chad (2019), Burkina Faso (2019), Senegal (2022), and the other West African countries Togo (2021) and Nigeria (2021) (Biedermann, 2019; Gbadamosi, 2022;

Özkan and Kanté, 2022). In the case of Niger, the security agreement from 2020 stipulates military training such as education and courses at military schools and centers; on-the-job training; mutual personnel exchange, including that of advisers and units; joint exercises as observer; operations other than war (i.e. peacekeeping and humanitarian aid operations); language courses; military history archives, publication, and museology; cooperation and training in logistical matters; and training/exchange in military intelligence, communications, electronics systems and warfare, cyber-defense matters, and defense against mines and explosives.¹³ According to several Turkish interviewees, this security agreement suggests that Turkey wishes to replicate its East Africa policy in the Sahel, which has included the training of Somalian security forces and police, and that it is also looking for the possibility of opening a military base in Niger in addition to the ones in Qatar, Libya, and Somalia (Interviews 5, 6 and 7).

As with the UAE, Turkey–Sahel military entanglements include the circulation of arms and military equipment: according to a Turkish Sahel expert (Interview 6), Turkish security companies like Baykar – which produces Bayraktar armed drones (used, among other places, in Libya, where Turkey has a drone base in Al-Watiya close to the Tunisian border) – form part of these entanglements as well. In his visit to Mauritania in 2018, Erdogan noted: ‘We especially desire to share our experience in defense industry with our Mauritanian brothers and sisters’ (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2018a). Indeed, on 5–9 April 2021, a delegation from G5 Sahel led by Executive Secretary Maman Sidikou accompanied by Major General Oumar Bedy and commander of the G5 Sahel Joint Force General Oumarou Namata Gazama, visited Turkey for the first time (De León Cobo, 2021). Apart from exploring avenues for future security cooperation, the purpose of this visit was to purchase Turkish military equipment for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and the delegation visited both the Military Training Academy and Turkish defense companies producing drones (Interview 6). They also met with the SSB agency – an institution established by the Turkish Ministry of Defense to coordinate the defense industry (De León Cobo, 2021). This suggests that military cooperation is increasingly becoming part of Turkish entanglements with the Sahel, and this entails to some extent the circulation of aid, arms, personnel, and knowledge, some of it seemingly facilitated through the transnational logistics furnished by Turkish Airlines (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2014). Accordingly, Turkish entanglements with the Sahel both are part of its broader foreign policy strategy of ‘opening to Africa’ and emerge from economic expansion of its domestic security and infrastructure industries.

Conclusion

The circulation of arms and material infrastructure that enables the movement of goods, people, and ideas between the Sahel and the UAE and Turkey has been at the center of the preceding analysis. To conceptualize these connections, we have drawn on the scholarship on entanglements across the humanities and social sciences and brought it into dialogue with recent advances on (in)security assemblages. While both literatures share significant commonalities and points of convergence, they have largely stood in isolation from each other. They both seek to move beyond the methodological nationalism that characterizes much social science scholarship on contemporary security dynamics and their historical trajectories; they emphasize the interplay between the human and the non-human; and they are grounded in relational ontologies that stress the processual nature of the making of the social world. The notion of entanglement advances contemporary scholarship of (in)security assemblages by adding a specific analytic angle: it zooms in on South–South connections between different actors within various assemblages and thereby brings to the fore the ways in which linkages beyond the North Atlantic shape politics and security in the Sahel. Theoretically, our notion of entangled (in)securities therefore

introduces a transregional dimension to our understanding of the ways in which multiple actors and their myriad connections across various scales shape the transformation of political orders and their complex trajectories, not only in West Africa.

Empirically, the concepts of transnationally entangled (in)securities helped us make sense of the variety of connections between the UAE, Turkey, and the Sahel countries and their potential influences on the transformations of political orders in this region. Some of these entanglements are material and infrastructural: especially transport logistics such as sea ports, airports, and new transport and trade routes that connect disparate continents and their geographically and historically contingent assemblages, and allow for new nodes of transregional circulations beyond the West. At the same time, some of these entanglements are ideational and discursive, and mobilize Southern visions of modernity and success, along both religious and secular understandings. As our analysis has shown, these entanglements are neither intrinsically opposed to nor supportive of Western interventions in the Sahel. Yet they introduce new material artifacts, rationalities, resources, and connections independently of Western agendas. Taken together, these transnational entanglements that we have documented complement rather than radically challenge existing accounts of the production of (in)security in the Sahel: they point to the persistent need to embed analyses of Western interventions and their various local responses in larger, transnational frames that also account for South–South linkages and circulations in the making of contemporary (in)securities.

The contribution of this article has therefore been to ‘globalize the research imagination’ (Kenway and Fahey, 2008) and to analyze and conceptualize transregional connections between various geographically specific assemblages. Future research could build on this research to explore in more depth the different drivers behind as well as the multiple effects of the entanglements we have identified. More research along those lines is needed to get a deeper understanding of the ways in which connections with the Sahel as well as with other contexts in the Global South alter the foreign policies, identities, and roles of Turkey and the UAE. These entanglements can both be instigated by and contribute to changing domestic political orders and power dynamics. At the same time, we also need a deeper understanding of the tectonic shifts currently underway in the Sahel. While Western actors are increasingly withdrawing, non-Western actors play ever more important roles in the political dynamics of the region. Even though the long-term effects of these changes remain to be seen, the perspective of transnationally entangled (in)securities that we have advanced here embeds these shifts in larger transnational frames and brings into focus how the production of (in)securities in the Sahel extends well beyond the region even as Western actors are retreating.

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ORCID iD

Eva Magdalena Stambøl  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2332-4844>

Notes

1. The focus on trans-/interregional connections excluded influential neighbors like Algeria and Libya, and moving beyond the BRICS excluded Russia. Russia has come to play an increasing role in the Central African Republic and Mali, where the governments have invited security assistance from Wagner and Russia.
2. In news outlets such as, inter alia, the Nigerien *Air-Info Agadez*, the Malian *Journal du Mali*, Middle Eastern outlets like the *Arab Weekly*, *Daily Sabah*, *Hürriyet Daily News*, and French-owned like *Jeune Afrique*, *RFI*, *France 24*, and *Africa Intelligence*.
3. See <https://www.wam.ae/en>.
4. See <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/en/>.
5. Personal conversation with Sahel researcher.
6. Published by the Emirates News Agency; see <https://www.wam.ae/en>.
7. Personal conversations with journalists and researchers working on the Sahel.
8. See Heibach and Taş (n.d.).
9. Personal conversation with journalist; Armstrong (2021).
10. E.g. Tanchum (2020); Ramani (2020).
11. See Çapan and Zarakol (2017) for an analysis of Turkey's 'postcolonial colonialism'.
12. Conversation, Turkish foreign policy researcher.
13. See the 2020 Military Training Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of Niger.

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5. Former TIKA staff, via Skype/Zoom/Teams.
6. Turkish Africa expert, via Skype/Zoom/Teams.
7. Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), via Skype/Zoom/Teams.

Eva Magdalena Stambøl is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law, University of Oslo, and the Center for Transnational Relations, Foreign and Security Policy, Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin. She is currently project leader for 'Criminalized Peace' and researches internal security as foreign policy, transnational crime control and peace processes. Her research has appeared in *Review of International Studies*, *Theoretical Criminology* and *Punishment & Society*, among other journals. Email: e.m.stambol@jus.uio.no.

Tobias Berger is Assistant Professor in Politics and International Relations at the Otto Suhr Institute, Freie Universität Berlin, and Principal Investigator at the Cluster of Excellence ‘Contestations of the Liberal Script’ (SCRIPTS). He is the author of *Global Norms and Local Courts: Translating the Rule of Law in Bangladesh* (Oxford University Press, 2017) as well as articles in *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *Third World Quarterly* and *International Studies Review*, among others.