

Beyond Trigger Warnings

Safety, Securitization, and Queer Left Critique

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Introduction

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We have followed campus debates about calls for safe spaces, trigger warnings, and Title IX. Like many of our colleagues, we have been concerned about approaches to safety that disregard the geopolitics of policing and punishment in and beyond academic institutions. And yet, the predominant critiques of these ideas focus on students, positing them as “special snowflakes” or, as is more common on the left, as neoliberal dupes who expect unprecedented attention and make unwarranted claims of precarity. We are dissatisfied with these approaches, even as we recognize how neoliberal logics can cast self-subalternization as a radical political claim; we look instead to analyses that move beyond the simple diagnosis of such a resonance to explore the complicated ways in which students and other people actually navigate life on campus today. Moreover, across the political spectrum, attention to college safe spaces has focused on sex and sexuality, even as campus development and militarization projects or opposition to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against the state of Israel also trade in these same terms. Given this, we are interested in what queer studies might offer to an analysis of debates over campus safety in the context both of increased repression and retribution across scales and of social movements. New approaches in queer studies take as their object of study not only sex and gender but also the cultural

politics of liberalism; in turn, scholarship on the geopolitics of injury demonstrates the situatedness of both identity and economic forms. Brought together, these scholarly approaches provide an important lens on many of the contradictions of the contemporary college campus.

Take, as an example, trigger warnings: verbal or written cautions that a representation of trauma may follow. For advocates of their classroom use, they are promoted as a proactive response to student vulnerability, especially following sexual violence. For those opposed, they are often described as attacks on free speech, or as anti-intellectual and individualized forms of coddling students. Still others point out that the demand for trigger warnings can punish faculty who are themselves vulnerable as teachers of sexual content or that posttraumatic stress disorder, the symptoms of which trigger warnings address, is not best managed by faculty. Many also seek to deexceptionalize sexual violence in relation to the many types of violation studied in classrooms, from the history of US slavery to ongoing state-sponsored genocide. Drawing on our own research on policing in US cities (Christina) and along state borders (Jasbir), and our shared interest in the vexed place of psychological knowledge in social movements, we are interested in what the call for trigger warnings also reveals about the cost-cutting decimation of student services (such as long waiting lists for mental health counselors) and what might be learned from public health practitioners in places like Palestine, who have critiqued the use of the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder for how it normalizes quotidian trauma, conflict, and war.¹ Or, if we literalize the trigger as that which sets off a firearm, what are the links or gaps between student activism for trigger warnings in the classroom and against guns on campus (either concealed, as in Texas or Kansas, or held by campus police, such as at the University of Chicago or Howard University, both in once working-class Black neighborhoods) or campaigns against wealthy philanthropists like Warren Kandors (at Brown University) whose profits come from the production of weapons used in such places as Ferguson, Missouri, and Palestine?

For this roundtable, we gathered scholars whose research takes on questions of safety and security, broadly conceived, that are in productive tension with queer studies, even as only some of our interlocutors explicitly identify with that field. Some roundtable participants consider these issues through the lens of sexual and gender politics specifically; others focus on liberal ideas of power, identity, and norms. In line with this issue of *Social Text*, central to this roundtable is the question of what counts as queer studies, and the continued utility of what has been called “subjectless critique.” Subjectless critique has come to mean many things, both as a foregrounded analytic in the 2005 issue of *Social Text* titled “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” and as part of a much broader move

across fields to multiply or destabilize the subject. For our purposes here, we approach the issue of safe space, one that has so adhered to debates about sex and gender, to both reflect on the prioritized subjects of these debates and detach their overdetermined significance.

Christina B. Hanhardt and Jasbir K. Puar: *For this first question, we ask you to consider the salience of the concept of safe space on campus—be that your own campus or elsewhere—and/or elaborate what you perceive to be the pressure points for the politics of safety and security more generally.*

Neel Ahuja: One entry point for addressing campus securitization is to consider how the state has begun to actively recruit scholars and students in the post-9/11 security state expansion. Although such strategies may feel far afield from student-initiated requests for making classrooms or departments “safe spaces,” it is interesting to note examples in which there is some overlap with the explicit strategies of the security state. The recent history of Islamophobic “countering violent extremism” (CVE) programming at US universities is a case in point. Echoing older laws that authorized colonial surveillance and suppression of nationalist movements, post-9/11 CVE programming claimed that states could prevent violence (mainly attributed to Muslim communities) by identifying and publicly countering “extremist narratives.” CVE originated first in United Kingdom and European Union counterterrorism policies in 2005 and later migrated to the Obama administration’s Department of Homeland Security, which began funding grants for local surveillance of US Muslim communities in 2014. Because “antiradicalization” programs like CVE are promoted by liberals as an alternative to traditional warfare, their racialized and militarized forms of surveillance and their extraction of the unpaid labor of students are usually ignored by journalists. The overlap between Obama CVE programs, university communication and public health department, and antibullying discourse is particularly salient. CVE programs targeting Muslim youth work on the assumption that the racism and resulting bullying, alienation, and susceptibility to radicalization they purportedly experience is inevitable and individual (rather than produced by geopolitical conditions). Producing digital space as safe space guarded by morally virtuous undergraduate mentors, supervised by liberal faculty, is the proposed solution.

In 2015, students in the undergraduate course Communications 163: Public Diplomacy at UCLA participated in an international antiradicalization competition launched by the US State Department and consulting firm EdVenture Partners. The students collaboratively produced a website and logo for their CVE initiative called Safe Spot. Informed by so-called experts on “ISIS itself as well as Islamic belief systems, interpretations of the Quran and the struggles of modern Muslims living in the west,” stu-

dents created web content targeting “isolated individuals” with testimonials of ex-Islamists, a discussion forum, and other propaganda.² Such coursework—which operates on the assumption that the unpaid student labor of producing social media narratives will be able to successfully preach liberal values to Muslim American youth experiencing racism—is funded as one of four categories of Homeland Security grants (Category 4: Countering the Narrative), which are in turn linked to municipal, nongovernmental organization, and police grants that engage in other policing, data mining, and surveillance operations targeting Muslims. Dozens of US universities received such grants, with emphasis on grants going to faculty in communications and public health. Given that the Trump administration has frozen federal CVE funding, the fact that universities have continued such work on a local basis demonstrates how discourses of student safety are intersecting with the university’s attempt to deploy its excess capacity for racial surveillance. There are some community organizations, such as the Muslim Justice League of Boston, that are doing excellent work to combat CVE, but there has yet to be a comprehensive reckoning with how such work is becoming institutionalized at US universities.

Kwame Holmes: I am particularly interested in the interaction between so-called trigger warnings, which prepare students to immerse themselves in potentially activating content, and those campus systems that alert students to the dangers posed by metallic triggers on firearms. Here I am referring to campus emergency notification systems. I have worked at three large public universities, and all encourage students, faculty, and staff to add their cell phone numbers to a database that sends out text alerts to list members during a major crisis. These systems can respond to natural disaster and are often used to communicate weather-related closures, fires, and—my subject—active shooter or assailant events. Their near universal adoption is an outgrowth of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, where many students lost their lives by remaining mobile during a shooting event. Given the scale of these potential and actual threats, some readers may worry that putting emergency systems and syllabus content warnings in conversation only confirms mischaracterizations of campus feminism (lobbed from the right and left) as self-referential ephemera.

Yet consider the following. In 1993, the *New York Times* published Katie Roiphe’s antifeminist polemic “Date Rape’s Other Victim,” which accused college feminists who circulated statistical evidence that 25 percent of women either were or would become victims of sexual assault of “walking around with this alarming belief: a hyperbole containing within it a state of perpetual fear.” Roiphe’s work remains popular among the anti-feminist right, but we should pay just as close attention to a subsequent *Times* article from 1995 that heralded the arrival of a modern emergency

notification system called CAMPUS SECURE at Syracuse University. The article, “Campus Safety by Computer,” tells readers of New Jersey dentist Michael Beales who had learned of “sexual attacks” on the Upstate New York campus “where he was dropping off his daughter Lara” to begin her college career. As it turns out, the *Times* described Beales’s response to his fear for Lara’s safety as a technical marvel rather than a paranoid fantasy. “Dr. Beales developed a device the size of a keychain that incorporates a radio transmitter. With the press of a button, it instantly tells a central computer in the campus security office where the person is and pinpoints the location on an electronic map.”³ According to the *LA Times*, Beales had sold his beeper system to five campuses, including the University of Bridgeport, Loyola University in New Orleans, and Scranton University.⁴

It would be another decade before cell phone saturation made it possible for universities to deliver messages to tens of thousands of community members at once. Still, attacks on campus feminism in the 1990s made space for the broad social acceptance of these technologies. After decades of reactionary, often evangelical attacks on feminist interventions against rape culture, research universities were, by the mid-1990s, the last large institutions to employ and support feminist activism. Higher ed cities like Columbus, San Francisco, and Austin were also home to more radical feminist formations like the Lesbian Avengers and Cunt Revolt, groups that often collaborated with undergraduates in women and gender studies. On and campus-adjacent feminisms combined calls for women’s physical safety with the need for cultural transformation through shared public emotional processing, informed by a range of psychotherapeutic techniques. These included confrontational street activism, reading groups, poetry slams, healing circles, and more. For campus feminism, affect was not a by-product of activism but a primary subject of intervention. Automatic alerts undercut feminist authority by simplifying the terms of safety, leaving us safe from the more complicated discomfort we experience when asked to interrogate our personal relationship to rape culture.

These systems “keep women safe” through an instantaneous connection with police forces, themselves trained to automatically respond with deadly force at the slightest hint of threat. Their absolute reach to campus community members closes the affective borders of the university, decentivizing collaboration with off-campus radical elements. Their emotional austerity allows the campus to rely, exclusively, on the small set of university administrators (overwhelmingly men) entrusted to activate alert systems. To confront rape culture, to teach affirmative consent, or even to raise the possibility that course content may retraumatize students is to ask campus communities to sit in emotional ambiguities that feel nothing like the “safety” provided by alert systems. Campus safety alerts, arriving as one item within a list of equally sized emails or texts, bring with them the

imprimatur of order. The speed of their delivery, their efficient circulation to the whole campus, and our technological self-consciousness all serve to reassure us that not only has someone seen something but they've said something. And we, thank heavens, won't have to.

Fatima El-Tayeb: In my research, I focus on Europeans of color, who are primarily portrayed within European politics, media, and often enough academia as a threat to the continent's safety and security—that is, Europe's cultural identity, progressive values, economic stability, and overall integrity. The safety and security of Europeans of color are most decidedly not treated as an issue, notwithstanding the fact that they are exposed to various forms of violence on a regular basis. European universities are still almost exclusively white on the level of faculty (Germany has a population of more than 80 million and fewer than a handful of Black professors). Students of color accordingly face a high level of isolation and rejection. In their organizing against this structural marginalization, they partially follow US models for safe spaces and trigger warnings in classrooms. This gets much press along the same lines as it does in the United States: the student activists are framed as spoiled snowflakes who see discrimination everywhere, while the hyperbolic reaction of the overwhelming white male professoriat screaming censorship is treated with much concern and sympathy. The students are also organizing for more faculty of color and the creation of ethnic and Black studies programs (not a single one exists in all of continental Europe).⁵ This gets close to no media attention or support from (white) faculty. The students' demands for safe spaces is largely dismissed (especially by the white Left) as imitative of US discourses that have no meaning in supposedly colorblind and enlightened Europe. To me it indicates that demands to be protected by the system do not have to exclude the attempt to radically change or dismantle it.

This is also evident at my home campus. I teach at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), where Tijuana, Mexico, is only miles away. While the conditions produced by the US government's response to the so-called refugee caravan got much attention and, temporarily, brought lots of press and volunteers to town, it is a relatively small group of activists who remain consistently involved. A number of them are current or former UCSD students, working until exhaustion, while also fluent in the language of self-care and trigger warnings. In my experience, the latter are often a shorthand for students' attempts to make sense of their shifting position in the world; that is, this is not necessarily about specific issues or images they are exposed to but about larger fears and stresses. Calls for trigger warnings, safe spaces, and especially self-care tend to activate my Grumpy Old Man Fatima persona, but I acknowledge that I come from a not very productive "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" background, which is

enhanced by being an immigrant into a culture that performs emotion in ways that are still sometimes baffling to me (and I do worry about the many immigrant students from similar cultural backgrounds who might not be helped but, rather, further alienated by this shift in campus culture). In classes, I try to work with community agreements instead, which means we proactively and collectively take ownership of the class room experience, focusing less on avoiding triggers than on strategies to deal with the anger, trauma, and sadness that invariably surface when addressing the experiences of communities of color under racial capitalism.

This is not to deny that we do have a responsibility for our students, which might not consist of avoiding all their triggers but does include care for their emotional well-being. As important are the material conditions they face and the resources they have, not only once they arrive at campus but also before—and attention to the fact that many potential students never arrive (the percentage of Black students at UCSD, for example, continues to hover around 1.5 percent, while that of Black faculty lingers at 2 percent).⁶ Administrators meanwhile have picked up on the advantages of focusing on students' mental and emotional well-being. In the face of attacks—be it a white man in La Jolla shooting Black people at a pool party “because his girlfriend left him” or escalating anti-immigrant rhetoric on the national level—our administration is quick in offering sympathy and references to campus mental health services. Universities can and should offer these services, but this is not where our responsibility ends or begins, or where our greatest strength as academic institutions lies.

Sherene Seikaly: In my research and political work, safety and security are mottos of dispossession. In Palestine, the Israeli state's mobilization of security and safety work to dispossess the Palestinian. The Palestinian stands as a threat to security, not a subject who may desire security. The War on Terror nourished this logic in the United States. While recognizing these post-9/11 realities, it is important to also work across and underneath them. Arab authoritarian regimes, whose intimate codependency and alignment with Israeli state interests and power are today clearer than ever, have long mobilized security and safety to suffocate revolutionary potential. How do we balance the longing for safety and security with our understanding of how these ideas strip, contain, and suffocate individuals and collectives?

To me, coming back to teach in the United States after a decade in Europe and later at the American University of Cairo, trigger warnings looked like another weapon to contain and police. On the first day of my modern Middle East history class, I gave a blanket trigger warning: everything in this course will trigger you. There will be blood. You have to deal. The regime of trigger warnings had placed a barrier between me and my students. It did not take long to wake up. I quickly learned to appreciate and

be empathetic to my students, who in the public system often navigate two, sometimes three jobs and face a future of debt, uncertainty, and insecurity. It took me a while, but I came to learn that the language of trigger warnings, as Fatima suggests above, was “often a shorthand for students’ attempts to make sense of their shifting position in the world.”

Dismantling the trigger warning as a barrier required two steps. The first was to invite students to search for commonalities in addition to differences among the Iraqis, Egyptians, Palestinians, Turks, Kurds, Algerians, Iranians, Israelis, and others they were learning about. The second was to explain that we were not just learning about these other people; we were also learning about ourselves. The tactics and strategies of historical actors are an abundant resource for confronting our realities. Students in the United States today are subject to the ravages of neoliberalism; they understand what it might mean for people in other places. Many students are increasingly denied the promises of security and safety. They live the reality that things can always get worse; we do not have to teach them this lesson. The task at hand is to dismantle and repurpose trigger warnings in a way that models radical empathy and provides students with tools to enact it.

Aniruddha Dutta: Concerns about safety are articulated in distinct and sometimes contradictory ways as they move across different geopolitical settings within and outside the United States. While doing ethnographic fieldwork in 2017, I participated in a discussion on safe spaces in a meeting of a queer-trans collective comprising individuals and nonprofit organizations within and beyond Kolkata, in eastern India. One attendee brought up an experience of sexual assault while working with a local activist, asking whether the collective could take any action to support such survivors. While the attendees were sympathetic, some expressed concern that the collective should not be turned into a *khap panchayat* or “kangaroo court” where sexual assault allegations would be arbitrated. They reiterated that the principles of “natural justice” would need to be followed. In the Indian context, *khap panchayats* are extralegal councils of caste elders who mete out popular justice to people who violate codes of caste patriarchy, such as intercaste couples. The evocation of the *khap* here suggests that the demand for adherence to natural justice principles goes beyond a liberal demand for due process so common in #MeToo conversations, to further reflect a concern over hegemonic social morality and mob justice that have imperiled queer, trans, and other marginalized people in South Asia and beyond. I pointed out routine cases of workplace exploitation within nonprofits where trans feminine *kothi-hijra* staff from working-class and Dalit (oppressed caste) backgrounds cannot even raise allegations without risking their livelihood—thus the exceptionalist attention to sexual assault would result in a safe space only for select middle-class activists who could afford to raise

such allegations. Another participant proposed that the collective should be conceptualized as an enabling space rather than a safe space, where complainants would be enabled to share their stories and seek legal help, but the collective would not pronounce judgments or take punitive action. In this context, the imperative of preventing miscarriage of collective justice takes precedence over “safe space,” which emerges as less of a valued ideal relative to many similar spaces within the United States.

At the University of Iowa, in response to students’ experiences of misgendering, my colleagues and I developed a paragraph on gender inclusivity and nondiscrimination for course syllabi that encouraged the use of preferred gender pronouns and forbade expressions of hate in the classroom. However, we were wary that such clauses could be used to shut down critiques of systemic power and privileged groups by teachers and students. I have received course evaluations that pan my classes as biased against white students. The syllabus insert thus specified that “the critical analysis of social hierarchies and systems . . . [and] any critique of advantaged groups is fully protected under academic freedom, and is quite different from singling out individual students who are members of such groups.” However, when this insert moved through the bureaucracy of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for approval, these sentences were removed. Another sentence targeting “expressions of hate and bigotry” against marginalized people was replaced by a broader clause prohibiting discrimination against protected identities, which excluded the specific word *expressions* so as to not run afoul of constitutional free speech protections. Seemingly, structural critique is not explicitly protected from the safe space discourse, but individualized freedom of speech is—and it is not students who are the agents or dupes of such a predictably neoliberal process but, rather, administrative logics that protect the university from potential litigation based on the first amendment.

And yet, the bureaucratic uptake of the insert also points to the rising institutional cachet of diversity—even the modified statement might not have been passed a few years ago. Following Sara Ahmed’s critique of institutional diversity discourse as a “nonperformative,”⁷ this episode points to how a tokenistic valorization of diversity and nondiscrimination might take precedence over structural change. While the modified nondiscrimination statement made its way into university syllabi, a Spring 2019 digital campaign by students using the hashtag #DoesUIowaLoveMe revealed unchecked incidents of racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, and transphobia on campus. Many students critiqued the lack of adequate resources for sexual assault survivors, the lack of therapists from minority backgrounds, long wait times for mental health care, and underfunded minority cultural centers. In a context where the Republican state government repeatedly mandates cuts in the university budget, leading to the retrenchment of staff,

adjunctification of faculty, and cost-cutting across departments (but not reduction of upper-level administrative salaries), a syllabus insert on safer and more inclusive classrooms may serve as a convenient gesture of institutional commitment to diversity without ensuring the resources needed to combat structural discrimination. Contrastingly, students involved in the campaign also evoked the ideal of the university as a space of safety and belonging but pushed it toward a systemic critique of infrastructural gaps.⁸

Safety and safe space thus gather contrasting valences—an aspirational tool for equalizing higher education, a neoliberal ruse that tokenizes diversity, a feared capitulation to hegemonic morality—rather than functioning as a coherent logic or discourse, neoliberal or otherwise.

Paul Amar: *Security* and *safety* have become defining terms shaping the management of populations and the content of pedagogy in US universities. In the twenty-first century, this trend has been paralleled by the systematic targeting of schools by armament cultures and militarized masculinisms, leading to horrific shooting incidents, intimidation and “lawfare” against student groups and faculty of color, and escalating student suicide rates. Educational institutions, as some of the last remaining spaces of the public, are serving as security laboratories. In this context, how could we imagine schools expanding liberal commitments to academic freedom and skills-based empowerment or, more substantively, aiming for redistribution of cultural capital and the means of knowledge production? Or will schools become prisonized as lockdown zones patrolling for bullying, trolling, or worse and thereby entirely folded into the security-surveillance industrial complex?

Take the university where I work, University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Perched on a beautiful plateau overlooking beaches and the Pacific Ocean, the school might seem detached from the violence of securitization and social change, but, in fact, we are at the heart of it. In 1968, students at UCSB and at San Francisco State University mobilized sit-ins and challenges to university administrations that led to the creation of the first Black studies and Chicano studies programs in California. In 1969 a historically massive oil spill surrounded the campus and generated international mobilization that catalyzed the environmental movement and founded Earth Day. And in 1970 a student uprising erupted against the Vietnam War and the LA Police Department (LAPD), which had been commissioned to rule Isla Vista (the unincorporated student city adjacent to the UCSB campus) with an iron fist, despite its location one hundred miles north of Los Angeles. In subsequent protests, UCSB student Kevin Moran was shot and killed by the LAPD. Ever since this age of student revolution, Isla Vista has been regarded as a zone of high security, with students intensively, “protectively” policed.

Another way to consider safety and security is in relation to the risk

management of study abroad and international research. UCSB is the home of the UC Education Abroad Program; my global studies department has the highest proportion of students in international study opportunities in the entire UC system. Despite their high profile, these programs have been choked by securitization. For example, students were ordered to leave Egypt during the Arab Spring. Subsequently, insurance companies and political-risk consultants have refused to authorize the reopening of study abroad in the country. This has had real economic effects on youth in the Middle East, since it led to the near bankruptcy of our partner school, the American University in Cairo. AUC is one of the most important educational institutions in the Middle East, which depends on international student tuition to be able to offer scholarships for less privileged Arab students. And this process has been repeated in a number of sites. The security or risk rating for a site seems to be shaped by generalized notions of cultural otherness, by Eurocentrism, and by political risk experts rather than by dialogue with knowledgeable educators on the ground, much less with youth and student movements in those world regions targeted as at risk. Programs in Paris, Rome, or London are never closed, although students frequently become injured or even arrested during study abroad in Europe. And, as we know, shooting and assaults of students in Santa Barbara are far more numerous than on any of our international campuses.

The university also watches over faculty travels, sending warnings that securitize faculty movement and displace liability onto them. I am worried that insurance, security, and political-risk agencies, not academics, are overseeing student study abroad and increasingly monitoring researchers. These risk agencies are not fluent in the nuances of the social, political, and educational contexts in these regions. Their calculations are not neutral in terms of world region or race and culture. I understand that universities are responsible for the undergraduates that study abroad under their umbrella. Yet students are adults, and it is odd that the educational process should generate mechanisms to reinfantilize students. The experience of study abroad should be the essential opposite of infantilization.

All of your responses demonstrate the usefulness and limits of safety rhetoric on the left and the right. Might you elaborate on what you see to be the implications of this flexibility, and how it has shaped life on campus, both for you as a faculty member and for students?

Holmes: Campus safety experts spend a significant amount of time thinking about how to make campus alert systems more effective. When safety alerts are effective, recipients respond to news of an emergency with “protective behaviors.”⁹ These include remaining still, reporting any sightings of a threat to security forces (most often campus police), and remaining atten-

tive to electronic devices for further instructions from campus authorities. Campus safety administrators are also keen to make safety alerts “sticky,” so that recipients will remain on high alert until every possible threat has been neutralized.¹⁰ The coercive bent of the campus alert system starts from the moment students, faculty, and staff join what is often called the “campus community.” Nearly every institution of higher education creates an email address for community members and strongly encourages them to submit their cellular information so that text notification can reach their phones in the event of an emergency. Nor can we blame campus administrators for their aggressive recruitment of user data. Following the tragic shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, a bipartisan Congress and the Bush administration passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which, among other things, amended the 1990 Clery Act to penalize colleges that failed to notify students about an ongoing threat in a “timely manner.”¹¹

Nonetheless, the tragic irony of campus emergency alert systems is that they succeed by inciting terror rather than alleviating it. A recent qualitative study of teen interaction with emergency alert system found participants were “likely to feel fear and worry if they received [emergency] alerts in a real-world setting.” To quote one of the participants, “I would do as the message says but in a panic.” Researchers also found that participants, “felt reassured and at ease upon receiving the ‘all clear’ message.”¹² Alerts produce panic, which incentivizes compliance. These findings demonstrate how emergency notifications systems create “campus community” through emotional management. Given the administrative compartments that separate student life from faculty and staff labor, receiving an emergency alert is one of the few “universal” on-campus experiences. In the wake of actual or neutralized violence, campus administrators will often praise members of the campus community for giving into threat response by complying with emergency instructions and participating in protective behaviors. We should be deeply troubled by gestures toward community amid moments of collective panic. Research into social anxiety finds that safety-seeking behaviors—in this case looking to security forces for instructions and reassurance during a disaster—can cause individuals to misattribute the feeling of safety to an external object or a compulsive behavior. In other words, emergency alert systems delivered to handheld devices, whose omnipresence hooks them directly into our central nervous systems, legitimize and reinforce both our fear response and an automatic trust in security forces.

You can, no doubt, intuit the problem this sort of emotional management poses to Black people on any college campus, but particularly predominately white institutions. Black people, to paraphrase Fanon, continue to represent a phobic object in the minds of the majority population; this is something few of us can ever forget. When I have received emergency alerts while working at predominately white institutions, I have not been reas-

sured. When a man wielding a machete was shot by University of Colorado Boulder police in the spring of 2016, the emergency alert left me concerned for my own safety. I now knew I was surrounded by thousands of fellow campus community members whose threat response had just been activated at the flip of a switch. Their heightened anxiety, I knew, would increase rather than decrease at news that the police had used deadly force, because the very deployment of that force would mark the suspect—without benefit of a trial—as a genuine threat to campus safety. It goes without saying that a campus of powerfully activated and anxious white people does not and cannot represent a safe space for people of color.

Digital notifications of everyday on-campus crime offer empty comfort for Black and brown people. While at the University of Virginia, my colleagues at the Woodson Institute were paralyzed by a crime alert that vaguely described a Black man “in a hoodie and jeans” who had been “identified” as a suspect in a number of recent sexual assaults. If emergency alerts during a potential mass shooting encourage deference to state violence, crime alerts actively deputize the campus community, encouraging anyone within a university’s digital jurisdiction to be on the lookout for relevant information. Here again, people of color are faced with the impossible choice of hoping the alleged criminal is quickly apprehended and battling fear that racialized crime anxiety will make them the victim of a different sort of violence.

Perhaps the most devastating moment in the experiential and narrative arc of the campus safety response is when, inevitably, the dean or university president announces that the event is over. Often this arrives as a notification indicating that “all is clear.” But is it? There are unreported micro- and macroaggressions on a daily basis. It is impossible for them to know that “all is clear” on their campus. Yet provided campus alert systems allow administrators to create a virtual record of safety, they can avoid accountability for their institutions inability to provide comprehensive safety all members of the campus community.

Amar: The gendered moral control of student life is a key battleground for the progressive as well as reactionary aspects of security and safety practices, where respectability politics and militarized economies fuse. Students are consistently interpolated as partiers rather than public citizens or activists. I am interested in the violence of infantilization when “child” subjects (of any age) are created structurally so as to render or represent them as unautonomous, insecure, debilitated emotionally and politically, and thus dependent on security regimes.¹³ This configuration reveals how the contemporary predilection toward shooting and caging children could emerge from a humanitarian hegemony obsessed with rescuing and protecting children.

UCSB students, despite their rich history of public engagement, political history making, and successful collective action, are routinely represented merely as wild things, especially in Isla Vista. A state of continuous moral panic hovers over the campus and residential areas, conscripting what Kwame describes here as phobic subjects. Protective and preventative policing explicitly defines the practices of the Isla Vista Foot Patrol (the security service that replaced the LAPD). This approach includes preventively arresting intoxicated young women to jail them overnight to “protect” them from hypothetical sexual assault. At the same time, efforts by student collectives to purge frat hazing and to focus on creative women-centered, trans-, queer-, and nonbinary-positive socializing and accompanying “decrim” policy around sex work, houselessness, and pot, have not won university support. Instead, fraternities persist untouched, and policing is the university’s primary response: chain-link fencing walls off the entire campus community from the outside world, and checkpoints and stop-and-frisk practices transform the campus into a militarized camp. Students and workers organized a housing cooperative and food coop and struggled for decades to gain municipality status for Isla Vista, which languished as a dependency of the county and the university. In 1972, activists won the Isla Vista Recreation and Parks District, but it was not until 2017 that they created a community services district, a “junior municipality” that provides sanitation, recreation, and other services but cannot pass resolutions around rent control or police oversight.

Rather than reproduce the discourse of safe space, this case study points to the importance of focusing on other kinds of advocacy: redistributive justice and substantive sovereignty among students and the communities within they live and work. Student organizers’ collective aim has been to create transparent mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of police, landlords, and campus administrators, as well as to shape responses to violence—not just sexual violence but also the violence of eviction, policing, “slumlord” neglect and price gouging, and racist/misogynistic housemate interaction. The effort to center issues of race, gender, sexuality, and migration in public governance, to support student sovereignty, and to redistribute resources stands at the heart of a “decrim” political economy of the university or a decarceral politics. These students advocate an alternative to the project of safe space that, as Christina has analyzed, deploys a police-centered framework in which sexuality triggers apparatuses of liability rather than fostering autonomy and collective transformation.

Ahuja: I have a couple of comments on these points. The first relates to issues raised by students in the classroom, the politics of safety within, and the moralizing discourse on student infantilization raised cogently by several of the responses above. As a practical concern, I think that some of

the criticisms of requests for content warnings and other interventions into pedagogical practice are worth careful consideration, as they can open into larger discussions of power dynamics at the university. Student activists, including feminist and antiracist activists who seek to rethink the power dynamics of the classroom, regularly point out how university classrooms and infrastructure have generally been hierarchical spaces in which access and resources are radically unequal. As greater numbers of students from more varied backgrounds are corralled into the university rather than given opportunities for formal employment, and as these students make demands for diversification of the curriculum and reckoning with structures of violence on campus, it should be no surprise that they might challenge the pedagogical assumptions and classroom technologies developed in the traditional disciplines. This includes requests that we carefully think about how we bring large groups of students into conversation around histories and representations of social violence.

I believe it is possible to do this without transforming such experiments into a regressive quest to make everyone at the university safe. That potential pitfall is something that the far Right in the United States has been attempting to exploit at my own campus. The American Renaissance—a blog and lecture series that attempts to project an elite and intellectual face for white nationalism—has created a series of posters for alt-right students to post on campus. These posters include messages like “it’s OK to be white” and feature idealized images of a retro white femininity that is to be defended against campus feminism. In 2018, these posters appeared multiple times on the hallway door outside the offices of several faculty in critical race and ethnic studies and feminist studies at UC Santa Cruz. On the level of content, such posters register how the Right attempts to couch its identity politics in the language of white minoritization and within biopolitical frameworks of demographic decline and durable cultural difference. Such strategies have been critiqued in a long line of critical race and feminist research on the post–civil rights racial revanchist race-gender discourses of the Right. The more complex element of the messaging occurs on the level of form. Because such posters were in this case targeted to interrupt the everyday messaging of departmental bulletin boards and office doors (where various safety and resource messages for trans students, sexual assault survivors, Muslim students, Spanish-speaking students, and others are displayed alongside event and book flyers), they take advantage of the apparent substitutability of group identity in the ecology of postings in order to suggest that white male safety would logically unfold as a natural element of identitarian claims of inclusion. But in this case, the purported threat to safety is the academic departments, curricular formations, and personnel present in the built space of the academic unit. As such, the postings draw power from their potential to activate the response of the

departments themselves, who may take a range of actions, including engaging campus police, publicly denouncing the posters, or enforcing campus flyer policies for removal. Although I simply removed the posters I found, notifying other faculty and staff about the incident led immediately to the generation of a report that went to campus police, whom I had not intended to involve. The posting effectively trolls the department into performing its relation to the institution as one of sovereignty, surveillance, and policing, most likely in ways that further the suggestion that women, people of color, and gender-nonconforming people hold outsized power at the university—all this despite the marginalized relation of these units to traditional disciplines, funding, and resources. Simultaneously, the spectacular and nostalgic nature of the images will be accurately read by persons transiting the space within a longer history of public spectacles of racism. In this case, the posters associating white nationalism with safety and inclusion messaging were particularly effective in rhetorically and performatively activating a revanchist logic of threatened white masculinity at the institution.

Seikaly: I am a scholar and product of Palestinian history. I am often frustrated when people express admiration because I work on and teach a topic that is so controversial. This categorization of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict and Israel/Palestine essentializes and exceptionalizes the place and its history. In the context of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and the entrenchment of the ongoing Nakba, or catastrophe, that is Palestinian reality, administrators and lobbyists weaponize safe space and free speech to shut down any critique of Israel. Antisemitism is a salient charge. These charges instill fear in teachers, students, and organizers. These patterns of policing speech and action have already escalated in the wake of Donald Trump's December 2018 executive order that elides the critique of Israel with antisemitism. Here, too, we can chart how the manufacturing of safe space, as Neel suggests, "can entrench the role of university administration and coursework in state security apparatuses."¹⁴ In a sense the Palestine/Israel case is a good case study for diagnosing the neoliberal belly of the safe space beast while fostering transformative and collaborative learning environments.

Several strategies can facilitate collaborative intentions and outcomes. First, it is crucial to delink safety from discomfort, to embrace risk and difficulty as rich opportunities for learning, and to aim for fostering brave rather than safe spaces. Here, too, I am following the leads of Aniruddha, who discusses above enabling as opposed to safe spaces, and Kwame, who suggests above that confronting the challenges of our times requires "campus communities to sit in emotional ambiguities." Three steps facilitate brave spaces in a course on Israel/Palestine. One is to decenter conflict as the only way to grasp the history, present, and alternative futures of Israel/Palestine.

For this reason, I teach a class titled History of Israel/Palestine, as opposed to the History of the Israel-Palestine Conflict. A second strategy is to locate Israel/Palestine in the broader histories it speaks to: European nationalism and its exclusionary and violent trajectory, Arab nationalism and its flaws and fallacies, settler colonialism as both an idea and a practice, the rise and consolidation of US empire, anticolonial revolutionary possibilities and failures, and race and racialization as mechanisms of subjectivity and power, to name a few. In making these links, students can deexceptionalize Palestine and learn to link it with broader conditions and phenomena. They can also experience how learning about people they understand as the other can teach us about ourselves.

A third strategy is to insist on antiracism as a shared goal. This insistence infuses the room with a mutual accountability to name, own, and tackle Orientalism, Islamophobia, antiblackness, and antisemitism. Students and scholars of Palestine who are invested in the Palestinian demand for freedom can shy away from engaging antisemitism because of how it has been weaponized to silence critique. This is not a viable strategy, neither pedagogically nor politically. The history and present of antisemitism are crucial to understanding the history of Palestine. Antisemitism is inextricable from historical and contemporary iterations and experiences of race. I devote considerable time in each Israel/Palestine course to learning about antisemitism and what it can tell us about European nationalism and the failed promises of the Enlightenment. I also engage how Jewish Americans' relationship to whiteness is historically shifting and contingent. Finally, I return to the idea of radical empathy I mentioned above. While administrators and lobbyists often speak on behalf of Jewish American students to silence critique of Israel, they do not and should not ventriloquize these varied experiences or concerns. In this vein, it is important to teach the Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic) not in opposition to but in conjunction with the Shoah ("catastrophe" in Hebrew), or the Holocaust. The Shoah and the Nakba are not comparable or similar. Teaching them together, however, does show us how catastrophe is central to both Jewish and Palestinian histories and experiences.

El-Tayeb: I would argue for an intersectional, bottom-up approach as our best chance to push for change and avoid being instrumentalized by the institution and integrated into a neoliberal model of securitized diversity that was always harmful but is especially so now.

This understanding is in part based on my experience as faculty at UCSD during the 2010 student protests against the so-called Compton Cookout, one in long line of racist, misogynist, and queerphobic events met with no or tepid responses by the university administration. On a surface level, the undergraduate-led activism could be seen as successful: as

a result of months of actions and negotiations, the university created a vice chancellor of equity, diversity and inclusion position and three new student resource centers (for Black, Latinx, and Native students, in addition to existing women's, LGBT, and cross-cultural centers), introduced campus-wide diversity requirements, and increased funding for the African American studies minor. Nonetheless, many activists—especially the queer and female students of color who sustained the movement with their tireless work—look back on their struggle with an acute sense of failure. While I agree that they did not achieve their major goal, namely, a campus hospitable to and representative of California's diverse population—in other words, a safe space for all students—I believe they have little reason to blame themselves. Rather, it was pressure from both administration and progressive faculty to be pragmatic that led to internal divisions and to the abandonment of the intersectional, grassroots approach developed by the undergraduates, which in fact had been quite successful. UCSD's Student Affirmative Action Committee was established in the 1970s as part of the struggle for the Lumumba-Zapata College, meant to represent students of color and working-class students. This coalition of progressive undergraduate groups was at the heart of the response to the 2010 Black Student Union's declaration of a state of emergency at UCSD. The activists saw the anti-Black and misogynoir Compton Cookout frat party not as a scandalous exception but as symptomatic of a neoliberal public university increasingly excluding the public. The students' demands thus were driven by an understanding of safe space that required the fundamental transformation of the campus. Their list of demands, while centering Black students, acted in the tradition of the Combahee River Collective's realization that "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression."¹⁵

The undergraduate activists succeeded in transforming the campus and in mobilizing enough resistance to force the administration to engage with all of their demands. These successes were undermined, however, by pressure to be "realistic" and "pragmatic," to focus on a single issue (incidents of anti-Black racism that would be resolved while leaving the larger system of exclusion intact), and to keep this private to UCSD (rather than continuing to build ties with local communities of color from which the campus usually is willfully isolated) and by the claim that effective negotiations require the designation of powerful leaders and the exclusion of the grassroots coalition driving the activism.

This pressure came not only from the administration but also from nominally radical male faculty taking on leadership roles. Unsurprisingly, this led to the increasing marginalization of female and queer activists who had done much of the exhausting and unglamorous work that had made

the movement possible. The end result of this pragmatism was a superficial diversity that could be used by the administration, while hiring and retention of faculty of color, especially Black and Native, remains abysmal and there are consistently low numbers of Black and Native students and a growing hostility toward identity politics and political correctness (also known as anything that would empower people of color). In retrospect, I am still deeply impressed with the students' commitment, political insights, and strategic smarts and utterly disheartened not so much by the administration's reaction, which was as expected, but by the failure of progressive faculty of color to support the students' radical vision, instead using their supposed expertise and power to force them back into a system beyond whose limits most of us seem incapable of seeing, even while it is imploding. If nothing else, this serves as a reminder that the current, seemingly individualized understanding of safe spaces is in part a reaction to a failure of imagination not of a new generation of apolitical students but of our generation of faculty.

Dutta: I want to reflect on contrasting right-wing utilizations of safe space discourse with reference to the aforementioned student-led #DoesUIowa LoveMe campaign. The immediate trigger for the campaign was an anti-immigrant demonstration on campus in February 2019 organized by the student group Young Americans for Freedom, which displayed a banner with the “Build the Wall” slogan on a campus walkway. Facing student backlash, the university administration restated its commitment to diversity but also cited its inability to curtail free speech and sanction student groups based on political ideology. During a meeting of a collegiate diversity committee, one of my colleagues, Naomi Greyser, pointed out that the group was looking for precisely such action. Young Americans for Freedom, supported by the right-wing Young America's Foundation (YAF), consciously baits universities into free-speech-related litigation. As the YAF states, “Are your free speech rights being curtailed on your campus? Of course they are! . . . especially if you want to promote conservative ideas. Well, we can help you push back.”¹⁶ This points to the imbrication of campus conservatism with right-wing organizing and capital, which selectively oppose the university's surveillance of “free speech” while extending nationalist logics of securitization and border control into the campus, all while positioning conservatives as putative victims. YAF's strategy of “pushing back” parallels the right-wing tactic discussed by Neel above, which “effectively trolls the department into performing its relation to the institution as one of sovereignty, surveillance, and policing.” However, both administrative and student response at Iowa frustrated the desired binarization of “free speech” and safety/diversity discourse (“political correctness” in YAF's words) that such baiting or trolling feeds on. The campaign did not

emphasize punitive action but, rather, used the incident as a lever to critique broader systemic issues, pointing out how support for the “free speech” of this right-wing student group is not matched by infrastructural support for underrepresented groups: “Many students said the quick defense offered to Young Americans for Freedom seemed in contrast to a lack of support campus minorities felt.”¹⁷ The baiting strategy was dodged without letting the administration off the hook, pushing the university beyond the liberal logic of free speech to address inequities in voice, representation, and systemic support that characterize the campus.

Meanwhile, ironically, campus conservatives have also utilized institutional mechanisms meant to further diversity and equity when it suits their purposes. For instance, recently the university released the results of a comprehensive campus climate survey meant to assess the state of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which predictably exposed significant experiences of gender, racial, and class bias faced by minority students, faculty, and staff. One suggestive finding was that conservative students claim the most discrimination in terms of political orientation but also state that issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are overemphasized. In other words, the discourse of discrimination is all very well as long as it does not disturb existing configurations of power on campus and beyond. I want to suggest that perhaps such contradictions in discourses of diversity and safety might be used as a lever to question right-wing tactics without falling into the aforementioned trap of reinforcing securitization and surveillance. The lure of diversity and safety discourse as a bait for free speech trolling, on one hand, and as a mechanism for articulating white/conservative victimhood, on the other, might serve to undo the dichotomy of liberal freedoms versus political correctness that the right-wing machinery relies on. The very slipperiness of safety/diversity politics that permits its uptake by the Right might also frustrate conservative deployments of these terms. Such ambivalence demonstrates the lack of any singular socioeconomic logic behind safety/diversity discourse seen in my previous response, and its inability to guarantee a liberatory or reactionary politics by itself.

Recognizing that you are not all identified with queer studies, do you see your theorization of security and campus politics as fitting within new or long-standing directions in queer studies, such as subjectless and queer of color critique, or, if not, what other frameworks resonate and why?

EI-Tayeb: My responses here and my larger research grapple with the question of pragmatism and radicalism: How much do we internalize the risk management logic of neoliberalism in our imagination of what is safely possible? How many risks are we really willing to take? Much of my work focuses on activism by queer people of color that falls out of common understandings of the political, or at least the politically effective, but that for me offers

examples of subversive practices imagining radically different socialities. Part of the challenge is to find modes of theorization that can appreciate these practices on their own terms, instead of measuring them against a model of progress that tends to fail multiply marginalized communities. Rather than favoring either so-called pragmatic approaches claiming to focus on what is achievable (as opposed to supposedly unrealistic radical demands) or allowing radical demands to stand in for the less flashy work of creating institutional change, queer of color critique for me is a mode of analysis and action that requires us to remain flexible and attentive to context. At the same time, it allows us to connect seemingly disparate or failed struggles to create a more complex and accurate—and ultimately more hopeful—picture of global resistance.

Ahuja: It was necessary to move away from a unitary sexual subject for queer critique to construct new accounts of the racial violences of neoliberalism and imperial war, especially in the early 2000s when the United States launched its new long wars in Southwest Asia. Those events have done much to produce our current moment of rising fascism, wherein minoritized identities form the archive of enemies central to fascist aesthetics. From this vantage, it is necessary to consider how our rendering as enemy is accomplished in part through our apparent success at institutionalization. So if queer theory continues to be generated primarily in the university, the hierarchical structure of its intellectual production will continuously pose the problem of who is situated to do critique, of who is excluded from the scene of intellectual production, and thus of whether critique can in any case be subjectless.

Amar: Going against the parochialism of certain conventional American studies or area studies work, my research examines how southern regimes of security shape power in the global North. I am particularly interested in how racialized and sexualized populations are rendered as targets of armament, punishment, and security—and simultaneously as the subjects of protection and rescue. This security trap makes unrecognizable the politics of redistribution or autonomy demanded by targeted/rescued populations. To help unlock this trap, I trace how resistance movements and projects of radical autonomy subvert these dynamics of securitization in order to expose the social prerogatives and material interests of security regimes and to enable politics of redistribution rather than protection, sovereignty rather than dependency or debilitation.

I generate subjectless critique by identifying and theorizing these tactics of desecuritization. Desecuritization constitutes a particular breed of materialist deconstruction, elaborated by activists in the sites I study. These activists expose and turn inside out security-state logics that render subjects stable or spaces safe only in accordance with the interests of militarized

capitalisms that dispossess and render dependent. These inspiring projects of desecuritization via participatory redistribution remind me a lot of the classroom-scale alternatives generated by my colleagues above—Neel in his discussion of students recoding Islamophobic CVE safe spots, Sherene and her students' deconstruction of barriers and redistribution of empathies, and Fatima's reimagining of trigger conversations as a collective labor of repositioning and sense making.

Holmes: In this roundtable, I've attempted to model a method for historicizing collective feeling through a cursory reading of objects (smartphones) through which we experience emotion and systems (emergency alerts) that manage emotions en masse. My analysis is indebted to affect theory, but that category of analysis remains too narrowly defined. My thinking about the relation between alert systems and my experience of terror when caught within a field of networked safety owes as much to Frantz Fanon and Hortense Spillers as it does Brian Massumi.

Indeed, we too easily forget that the political movements that produced Black studies, women and gender studies, and various iterations of queer inquiry were themselves in a generative (though often uneasy) relationship with psychoanalytic therapeutic methods. Well, to be fair, the *we* I am referring to here are my fellow historians. Yet as history expands its purview from telling the stories of queer subjects to incorporating queer theory as method, modern Americanists will need to return to the emotive origins of the social movements we study. What happens to our studies of Black Power, when we take seriously Fanon's career as a practicing analyst? How can we better narrate the conflict between white and Black feminisms if we don't take seriously Hortense Spillers's discussions of the impossible subject position of Black women in the West? Can we make sense of the origins of modern homonormativity without always keeping in mind gay liberation's preoccupation with shame? I guess I'm saying, no, we can't.

Until now, historians have primarily narrated those once-marginalized identities as launch pads for political activity that can be measured by the success or failure of legislative agendas. However understandable, the field's reluctance to engage emotion as a material structure, as a means through which police and market forces manipulate the public over time, has left a range of topics—histories of campus alert systems being only one example—without a disciplinary home. If we, for example, engaged moderate centrism as an ideology that strictly regulates emotion, in order to stifle radical politics, we can tell a range of new stories. Suddenly, the ascendance of objective markers of character, like credit-rating systems, merit-based affirmative action, or the use of DNA results in the criminal justice system can be woven together as exogenous bulwarks to centrist supremacy. Thinking about historical emotion and, more pressingly, about the way cen-

trism squeezed emotion from public view can help us understand the popularization of Donald Trump, who offers an affectively starved nation an endless buffet of rage, fear, projection, and absurdism that cannot coincide with capital's efforts to make the populace ever more predictable. Queer theory, and its willingness to move away from subjects and their agency, opens an opportunity for us to write about those waves of collective feeling that have an anything but ephemeral impact on society.

Dutta: This question evokes for me a rich moment in the politics of field formation in South Asian academia. Tensions at the intersections of South Asian studies, feminist studies, and queer studies became apparent after a list of sexual harassers in academia (LoSHA), comprising male academics of mostly Indian origin located across India, the United States, and Europe, was circulated on social media in October 2017.¹⁸ The LoSHA, which paralleled lists like “Shitty Media Men” in the United States, was crowd-sourced and posted by Raya Steier (formerly Raya Sarkar), a US-based Dalit genderqueer feminist. The list withheld the names of the accusers and didn't spell out the specific charges for many of the accused, which Steier later clarified was meant to prevent reprisals against student complainants. The LoSHA prompted passionate debates. A statement by fourteen senior Indian feminist scholars and activists castigated the list's methods, arguing that anonymous complaints reflected a lack of accountability and undermined feminist efforts to institute “fair and just” forms of due process.¹⁹ LoSHA supporters argued that due process had repeatedly failed survivors and that the list pointed to the need to tackle institutionalized hierarchies that prevented survivors from coming out and accessing justice. Given that Steier and many of her allies were young Dalit or Bahujan (varied oppressed caste) feminists, while the statement signatories were older and mostly Savarna (“upper” caste), the debate soon came to be described as both generational and between Savarna and Dalit feminisms. The statement signatories and their allies accused LoSHA supporters of vigilante justice and of splintering the feminist movement. Commentators such as Shreya Ila Anasuya responded that South Asian feminist academia and activism were highly hierarchical and exclusive to begin with, echoing the long-standing critiques of white, Western, and imperial feminism by women of color and postcolonial feminists.²⁰ Dalit Bahujan writers and activists such as Shivani Channan and Kuffir Nalgundwar argued that Savarna feminists were, in effect, protecting their Savarna male friends and maintaining close-knit elite academic networks.²¹ LoSHA allies contended that this was a moment for the Savarna-dominated fields of South Asian feminism and postcolonial studies to interrogate their own hierarchical exclusions.²²

These debates evoked safety in contradictory ways. Some scholars launched a familiar mode of queer critique that saw the LoSHA as a mani-

festation of a morally upright liberal feminism that was replacing risky, subversive struggles for sexual freedom with a conservative identitarian discourse of safety that essentialized women as victims, attempting to make the university into a sanitized space.²³ Even as this critique was castigated for missing power differentials for an idealized antinormativity, some LoSHA supporters charted a very different relation between the list and safety, seeing it as a disruptor of the institutional status quo and silences that made academia safe for harassers while denying safety to survivors.²⁴ Concepts of safety may be deployed in highly divergent and inconsistent ways, and here we see how this fundamental ambiguity positions the LoSHA and related struggles of field (trans)formation. Is the list promoting safe space, disrupting safe spaces, or doing both but for different constituencies? Does the LoSHA strengthen institutional mechanisms of control through the evocation of student/campus safety or is it fundamentally anti-institutional? A key potential of the LoSHA might lie in precisely in how it troubles some of the binaries (safe/unsafe, institutional/anti-institutional, normative/antinormative) it evokes. For the stakeholders who seek to influence the future of South Asian academia through this debate, antinormativity and subversion remain key values, but the norms they seek to subvert (Savarna hegemony, institutional structures, liberal feminism) shift, resulting in a contestation over the anti/normative status of the list and its relation to discourses of safety. This contestation, like my previous examples, exposes safe space discourse as a noncoherent object and the multiplicity of subjects and geopolitical determinations driving its manifestations, suggesting the continued salience of the subjectless and objectless modes of critique traced by David and Jasbir in their introduction to this issue.

Seikaly: Palestine studies and queer studies have rich intersections that embolden political and intellectual visions and possibilities. My colleagues Laila Farsakh, Rhoda Kananneh, and I edited a special issue on queer theory and Palestine studies in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, titled “Queering Palestine.” This flagship journal of Palestine studies has aimed to attract academics and policy circles. Farsakh, Kananneh, and I sought to break new ground by highlighting the work that scholars of queer theory were doing on and with Palestine. For the last decade, scholars in American studies and ethnic studies have been grappling with Palestine in rich ways. Yet, Palestine and Middle East studies have not been typical venues for this scholarship. We sought to transgress what at times appear to be mutually exclusive fields. We hoped to expand the boundaries of Palestine studies while pushing scholars who work on Palestine from queer and ethnic studies to engage more thoroughly the theories and findings of Palestine studies.

Puar’s *Right to Maim* is a formative text that puts Palestine studies in conversation with queer studies. Here biopolitics of debilitation foregrounds

the slow wearing down of people, the maintenance of precarity of certain bodies, and a persistent attenuation of life. This attenuation in Palestine and far beyond is not an event but a process. Puar suggests there is an ongoingness of getting by, living on, in the midst of dispersed structural violence and inequality. In Palestine, this process is the ongoing Nakba, the continual process of settler dispossession. In conversation with Gayatri Spivak and Sylvia Wynter, Puar reenvision the mute subaltern and the genres of the human. She calls for resisting the fantasy of queer exceptionalism and connecting the regulation of queerness to the regulation of sexuality and bodies write large. She argues that we must refuse the exceptionalizing mandate of the Israeli state that props up homosexuals as sexual citizens par excellence, and she ties this homonationalism to the nation-building project of rehabilitation, reproductive biopolitics, and the capacity and debility of bodies. In this way, ableism is intertwined with hetero and homo reproduction.

One of the most powerful questions the book asks is how we envision the day after we get what we want. This call to imagine the day after a revolution or a liberation to come is one way to think about redefining safety and security to forge brave learning spaces. Puar's instruction here is to distinguish between rights and justice in order to imagine a world where bodily capacities and debilities are embraced and not weaponized, and to remember that justice does not have to equal sameness or assimilation. Or in the powerful words of Mia Mingus, the disability justice activist that Puar thinks with: "We don't want to simply join the ranks of the privileged; we want to dismantle those ranks and the systems that maintain them."²⁵

Conclusion

One of our main interests in putting together this roundtable was to provincialize US-based queer studies by insisting on a geopolitically inflected contextualization of the debate on safe space. Rendering classrooms and other places on campus as intrinsically embedded in global relations of militarization, securitization, dispossession, and risk management, safe space is elaborated in this roundtable in material, administrative, and pragmatic terms: from the conceptualization of alert systems to the racialized fears driving insurance calculations for international study programs. Amar's remark that US university campuses are now security labs for the honing of technologies of control all too eerily resonates with the use of Gaza as a laboratory for testing weaponry and defining the supposedly uninhabitable. Given the uneven accessibility of higher education within the United States, these kinds of material and ideological connections are important for destabilizing the monolith of the neoliberal student consumer subject that too often takes center stage in debates about campus safety, sexual assault, trigger warnings, and the like. The turn in queer theory to subjectless cri-

tique has been crucial to excavating relations of affect and bodies and the harnessing of emotion by technologies of control. And yet, as Neel reminds us, the subject producing the subjectless critique is nevertheless mired in the self-reinforcing privileged circuits of knowledge production.

That said, connections among these fields of knowledge, institutional sites of power, and modes of political organizing are proliferating. As this roundtable was being conducted, we participated in the campaign to remove Warren Kanders from the board of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Kanders is the CEO of Safariland, a company that produces, among other items of warfare, tear gas canisters that have been used at the US-Mexico border as well as in Gaza. Decolonize This Place, the activist group leading the effort at the Whitney, argued in one of their many pieces of visual protest material, “There is no safe space for profiteers of state violence.”²⁶ This redeployment of the term, like other examples showcased in this roundtable, refuses the safety of unchallenged power for those who deny safety for others and demonstrates that the flexibility of the concept can be used to challenge dominant formations of power on a global scale.

Notes

1. See Rabaia, Saleh, and Giacaman, “Sick or Sad?”
2. See Wolf, “UCLA Students Seek to Counter Extremism.”
3. Martin, “Blackboard.”
4. Sayre, “Help Is a Beep Away.”
5. See Birmingham University, “University to Launch Europe’s First Black Studies Degree.”
6. See CollegeSimply, “UCSD Demographics and Diversity.”
7. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 116–17.
8. Bauer-Wolf, “#DoesUIowaLoveMe.”
9. Mileti and Peek, “Social Psychology of Public Response.”
10. Whitmer, Torres, and Sims, “Change in Memory of Emergency Warnings.”
11. Rob, “Tracking Campus Crimes.”
12. Wong, Jones, and Rubin, “Mobile Text Alerts.”
13. Amar, “The Street, the Sponge, and the Ultra.”
14. See Makdisi, “Push to Quash Criticism of Israel.”
15. Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement.”
16. Young America’s Foundation, “Campus Activism.”
17. Bauer-Wolf, “#DoesUIowaLoveMe.”
18. *Firstpost*, “List of Indian Academicians Accused of Sexual Harassment.”
19. Menon, “Statement by Feminists on Facebook Campaign to ‘Name and Shame.’”
20. Anasuya, “Response to a List of Sexual Harassers.”
21. Channan, “‘The List’ Is a Time’s Up Moment.”
22. Dwivedi and Mohan, “Amid Changing Nature of Sex as an Activity.”
23. Bose and Sen, “Liberal Vertigo, Eros, and the University.”
24. Pal, “Why Raya Sarkar’s List Is Not Vigilantism.”
25. Puar, *Right to Maim*, 16.

26. This poster was designed by Decolonize This Place (DTP) member and artist Kyle Goen in collaboration with other members of DTP. To see more go to kylegoen.net.

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