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Horizon Scan: Critical security studies for the next 50 years

Mark B Salter (ed.), Carol Cohn, Andrew W Neal, Annick TR Wibben, J Peter Burgess, Stephan Elbe, Jonathan Luke Austin, Jef Huysmans, RBJ Walker, Ole Wæver , Michael C Williams, Emily Gilbert, Philippe M Frowd , Doerthe Rosenow, Bruno Oliveira Martins, Vivienne Jabri, Claudia Aradau , Anna Leander, Antoine Bousquet, Anna Stavrianakis , Maria Stern, Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, Luis Lobo-Guerrero, Marieke de Goede, Rocco Bellanova , Hugh Gusterson, Charlotte Epstein, Jennifer Mustapha, Kristoffer Lidén, and Lene Hansen

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Commentaries

The jig is up: The logics of imperialist, patriarchal global capitalism and the death of security

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What is changing? This: the contradictions and predations of patriarchal imperialist capitalism, and of the deeply racist and gendered material and symbolic order it produces, have enabled an accelerating, unrelenting, unfettered extractive stance toward the planet, its ecosystems and natural resources, and the plant and animal species and human beings that inhabit it. That stance has not only resulted in increasingly outrageous inequalities and concentrations of wealth; it has gotten us to the brink of climate catastrophe, ecosystem collapse, and a vast, literally unimaginable intensification and expansion of human immiseration and suffering. So what is changing in security (if not in security studies, critical or otherwise) is everything – from the entire context of stable planetary ecosystems that gave rise to the way our world is politically, economically and socially structured, to our understandings of those structures, and to our models and theories of what constitutes security within them, be it state security or human security.

We can no longer claim to be thinking about security unless we address the model that conceives the purpose of economic activity as ever-increasing ‘efficiencies’ of extraction, exploitation and consumption of nature’s resources, and of human labour, both paid and unpaid, for the purpose of profit – rather than, for example, conceiving the purpose of economic activity as meeting human needs for a decent and dignified life, and ensuring the sustainability of the resources and ecosystems on which life depends.

Consider just these few snapshots of what that model has produced: How is it possible to talk about ‘security’ while ignoring them/without centring them?

- In 2018, the world's 26 richest people owned as much total wealth as the poorest *half* of humanity – that's 3.8 billion people (Oxfam, 2019: 12).
- As global warming accelerates, ocean temperatures, acidity and pollution are all rising, damaging marine biodiversity, fisheries and ecosystems.
 - Fish accounts for over 50% of protein in many least-developed countries, while 80% of the world's fish stocks are already fully exploited or overexploited (United Nations, 2017).
 - About 97% of the world's fisherfolk live in developing countries, and fishing is their major source for food and income (United Nations, 2017).
- Increasing ocean temperatures cause increases in vector-borne tropical diseases, including to areas where there are no immunities.
- Sea levels are rising and storms intensifying, while nearly 2.4 billion people (about 40% of the world's population) live within 60 miles of the coast (NASA Science, n.d.).
- Transnational forces, from global climate disruption to the globalization of markets, corporations and finance, make a mockery of national 'sovereignty' and democratic control.

If patriarchal, imperialist, extractivist capitalist paradigms and institutions continue to dominate humans' relation to the planet, security – of the planet, of states, of people and of other life-forms – will be not just unattainable, but massively degraded in ways that are literally unimaginable to us.

And if we – as a journal, as researchers and theorists – continue as though this were not the case, we condemn ourselves to irrelevancy. That will not make us unique: institutional, disciplinary, professional momentum and inertia make it extremely difficult for any institution to change from business as usual. And most institutions won't. But certainly if we don't, we won't make much of a contribution to the urgent life-work of interrupting this careening toward catastrophe.

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Neophilia

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As a provocation, I propose that what is constant in critical security studies is *neophilia*, the love of the new. After all, *Security Dialogue* calls for 'cutting edge approaches in theory', 'new empirical findings' and 'new approaches and methodologies'. There are, of course, compelling reasons in favour of neophilia. We have a political and scholarly duty to engage with the implications of new security problematizations and technologies, which appear at a relentless pace. Critical security studies is good at this. Neophilia has led to early insights into, for example, the social construction of security problems, and risk and resilience as modes of security governance. It has also fostered a sensitivity to social justice agendas such as feminism and the decolonial movement. In contrast, traditional security studies is a conservative discipline, wedded to old concepts, approaches and methodologies, and inadequate to the new.

However, neophilia may have its downsides. In my recent work, I engage with the 19th-century English constitutional commentator Walter Bagehot, who once wrote: 'We may easily miss the permanent course of

the political curve if we engross our minds with its cusps and conjugate points' (Bagehot, 1930: 17: see also Neal, 2019). I read this as a note of caution about the love of the new and our attraction to drama and urgency. What about the trend rather than the crisis? What about evolution rather than scandal? What about negative findings, when we do not find the newness we expected, or do not find 'security' at work?

Caution against neophilia speaks to a debate elsewhere in the social sciences: the replication crisis. In psychology in particular, scholars have been unable to replicate the findings of classic studies that had been generally accepted rather than revisited and retested. As a caveat, there are reasons why replication is not directly applicable to us: critical security studies does not ape the natural sciences, does not perform experiments under controlled conditions, and knows the falsification model is an idealization rather than a description of how science is done. That said, the replication crisis does pose some challenges to the neophilia of critical security studies:

1. Neophilia may discourage us from doing research too similar to what others have done.
2. Neophilia may discourage us from re-evaluating our assumptions.
3. Neophilia favours the investment of time, labour and symbolic capital in original research, and not revisiting existing work.
4. Publishing and career progression reward neophilia.
5. Neophilia discourages negative findings. (Points adapted from Everett and Earp, 2015)

Despite my caution, reviewing the content of *Security Dialogue* over several years does not necessarily reveal a systematic neophilia, but perhaps only a tendency. There are even some 'mature' debates, such as around securitization. However, it might be fair to say that the works that generate the most excitement are those that appear theoretically 'cutting edge' or tackle urgent political problems posed by new security problematizations. Scholars have long since warned against the exceptionalism of the discipline, and this warning still stands. Although there is now extensive work on routine security practices, we still need to be careful not to reproduce the exceptionalism of our object – security – through neophilia. Would this journal ever publish an article that says, 'Nothing of concern here'?

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What remains constant

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Our tendency is to become comfortable with our frameworks; to pay too little attention to their effects. Hence we need to continuously challenge the limits of our imagination and remember 'that framing issues in particular ways and drawing attention to some issues and not others makes us in part political actors' (Wibben, 2016: 137). It remains necessary to highlight how 'doing security', including critically examining security practices in our research, always has political effects. We should challenge ourselves to do research in spaces that contest currently accepted meanings of security to complicate those understandings and think harder about what security might mean – and for whom.

As critical scholars of security, we know that security is a practice enacted in the everyday also; that studying security requires attention to how particular security acts reveal their own conditions of possibility as well as opportunities for disruption or refusal. Taking the everyday seriously is necessary because it is a key site

where security practices produce effects. For feminist scholars, this is doubly important, since their engagement with (and/or situatedness in) particular activist communities gives the work an urgency, but also a grounded quality too often lacking in academic spaces (see also the discussion of companionship in Austin et al., 2019). It is relatively easy to be critical in the abstract; when we pay attention to the everyday in and with the communities we study, critical scholarship gets harder – but also better.

Here, critical security scholars could learn from feminist peace research, which integrates the normative goals of feminism and peace research so that the ‘transformation of gender relations [becomes] a constitutive element of peaceful societies’, as Catia Confortini argues (in Wibben et al., 2019: 88). She goes further to note that feminist peace research ‘is even more ambitious: it is prefigurative of feminist peace [that has] an emancipatory objective and a project for a peaceful and just social order, which not only includes, but makes central, feminist goals’. What would it mean to have this conversation among critical scholars of security? While I would be among the first to criticize how ‘emancipation’ has thus far been translated into critical security studies (see Wibben, 2016: 141–142), the question whether there is a transformative goal that unites critical scholarship on security should be asked, not least since the echoes of what Peter Burgess (2019: 101) calls ‘the ethos of the critical project ... a determined quest to move us from where we are to a place more true, more authentic, more just or more real’ reverberate loudly.

Burgess (2019: 102) reminds us that ‘the authentic mode of critique ... is a fundamental enactment of insecurity’. I would like to propose, in a slightly more practical mode, that this recognition of the foundation-less-ness of our critical project(s) should lead us to inquire more deeply into the political aims and effects of critical security scholarship – while also recognizing the always unfinished nature of our interventions. We might, with Debbie Lisle (2016: 418), hold on to an in-between that ‘is not a happy place of resolution and satisfied contentment: it is instead a difficult and demanding terrain of inquiry that scholars must fight hard to keep open, pluralistic, and hospitable to new ideas’ – one that we must be ready to reassess.

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The moment of vulnerability

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Both the concept of security and the assumptions and conditions of the research that track it through time, in different contexts, and across varying types of concerns, have in a certain sense remained stable. Despite the vast range of its expressions, ‘security’ remains consistently and predictably understood as a general structure that connects the existence, integrity or well-being of an object to the horizon of its damage or destruction as the result of external threats. The premises are by and large constant, seldom submitted to scrutiny.

The status of the criticality of ‘critical security studies’ is fundamentally different. Of course, ‘critique’, its theorization and exercise, also makes up a vast field, much of which is constant and predictable. And yet the practice of critique requires a new kind of being and a new mode of uncertainty. If the critical posture of critical security studies is understood as a putting into question the foundation of any given claim about security

or based on ‘security studies’, the question then becomes, what is the status of the critique itself? On the one hand, any assertion must stand on a foundation. Only what Kant calls ‘analytic’ assertions (‘all bachelors are unmarried’) do not require foundation. Any critical assertion that is doing critical work is leveraging already existing knowledge linked to a pre-existing reality. On the other hand, this pre-existing foundation is itself necessarily exempt from critique. Critique stands on its own or it is not critique. Critique that originates from a non-critical position, from a position whose reality and truth is taken for granted, taken as true and real, is obviously biased or flawed critique. It is coming from a standpoint that in the moment of critique is shielded from that critique. It is coming from a subject position whose history and politics is invisibly and silently predetermining the assessment and corrective that is applied to the object of critique.

This is the fundamental paradox, the necessary paradox of critique: in order to do its critical work it must come out of nowhere, target nothing, be nothing. By virtue of having a foundation, a starting point, a standpoint, a reserve of knowledge and an unquestioned being, its critical valence is only partial, qualified, incomplete or imperfect. The part of the world it seeks to change remains stuck in the part of the world it cannot change. The mission of critique is firmly anchored in the non-critical.

What would the ideal form of critique look like, the critique of security studies that was constantly changing? It would have to consist of a kind of cutting free of the foundation at the moment of exercising the critique. It would be a radical kind of risk-taking, a pure throwing of caution to the wind, cutting loose from all presuppositions, all assumptions, surrendering to the wisdom, intuition and insight required to understand the world without recourse to a model.

Security and its entanglements

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Perhaps more than any other journal in its field, *Security Dialogue* has managed to successfully capture just how manifold and pervasive the entanglements of security and society have become over the past 50 years. But what if security is also entangled at a much deeper – and even ontological – level? What if, to invoke the philosopher Karen Barad (2007: 33), security too unfolds within the horizon of an ‘ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components’.

If security is entangled *ontologically* in this way, then it cannot simply be seen as existing prior to, or independently of, its intra-action with other phenomena and agencies. Security must rather be considered as an intensely relational phenomenon that is continuously emerging out of, and bleeding into, this world. Its ‘mattering’ will always be a ‘boundary articulation’ that enacts ‘a resolution within the phenomenon of some inherent ontological indeterminacies to the exclusion of others’ (Barad, 2012). For that very reason, the study of entangled security also cannot just commence by delineating a number of fixed differences that set security apart from the world; it must rather explore how those differences around security are themselves continuously ‘made and remade, stabilized and destabilized, as well as their materializing effects and constitutive exclusions’ (Barad, 2012).

Those wider processes through which security comes to matter do not just unfold ‘out there’ in the world. They are also effected via our theories of security. From the perspective of entangled security, those scholarly apparatuses are highly significant not merely as powerful conceptual tools for studying security, but as crucial and active participants in its intra-active materialization. Put differently, many of our most influential security theories are ‘not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices – specific material (re)configurations of the world – which come to matter’ (Barad, 2007: 140). A scientific analogy drawn from quantum physics may be helpful here. According to the famous Danish physicist Nils Bohr, ‘uncertainty’ is not just epistemic (as it was for his interlocutor Werner Heisenberg) but ontic – in the sense that a given particle does not exist in a fixed state prior to the act of measurement; it only begins to take on properties through the process of observation (Barad, 2007: 19, 116). Many security theories ‘do’ a very similar thing to security that

(Bohr argued) measurement ‘does’ to a particle; they too enact particular ‘cuts’ that separate security out from its radically entangled state and begin to endow it with particular properties.

To take seriously, then, the proposition that security is entangled at an ontological level is to acknowledge that our knowledge of security will always remain imperfect at best, and that the study of security will necessarily form an ongoing quest. Furthermore, it means that security scholars are ultimately part of, and therefore also have responsibility for, the phenomena they try to understand. Exercising that scholarly responsibility around security, and persisting with this unfinished analytical work, will require an open and welcoming space for critically reflecting upon exactly how it is that security comes to matter. Perhaps a small part of *Security Dialogue* moving forward could be to provide some of that vital, valuable and much-needed space.

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Critique and post-critique

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Critique is changing. Democratizing, in fact. Whether we like it or not.

Social critique was once perceived as an intellectual endeavour. This was true despite the many actors who have always engaged in critique of a kind: citizens, journalists, terrorists, militias. Today, however, such ‘ordinary critique’ can no longer be ignored. Instead, it forces itself upon us in ways that amaze and alarm. Deleuze is gleefully employed by militaries, the new right embraces Gramsci, while media conglomerates control us via Jameson (Austin et al., 2019; Austin, forthcoming). These forces engage critique *and* transform our worlds in doing so. Their emergence represents a dramatic shift, analogous to the 19th-century rise of a reading public: the growth of a new critical *writing* public (Yancey, 2004). If, as Derrida (2016) suggests, the original idea of science and critique emerged during a specific epoch of writing, then a new epoch of writing has produced new critical publics – publics that draft their own manifestos, philosophize in their own words and worlds, and take their ideas towards the streets with furious anger.

The question that must now preoccupy those who believe critique should represent something other than the instrumental use of reason for parochial ends is thus less why we need critique and more how we can make a different critique matter today. Whomever you start with – Kant, al-Haytham, Marx, etc. – critique has been associated with change: with enlightenment, denaturalization, social (re)ordering and beyond. Critique possesses authority because its procedures can produce change. But how this occurs is mysterious. Critique is a source of possibility, but one we are unsure how to harness. Marxists remember the revolutionary days, unable to relive them. Liberals hold high enlightenment ‘progress’, as the world runs aground. The postcolonial majority seek different futures, knowing their colonization continues. Critique holds the hopes of many. But how to make it matter? That’s always the question.

In the face of these challenges, critique *within* the walls of academia must be reimagined. It has already changed elsewhere. It is our duty to change it for different purposes. In this, critique must become kinder in its engagements and sharper in its targets (Austin et al., 2019). It must renounce the spectre of totalities and their futile denunciation – those old images of neoliberalism, fascism and nationalism – and instead subvert from within. It must engage with those it sees as enemies, earnestly: there can be no blanks (Austin, forthcoming). But it must also regain the future. It must build different futures over regretting present states in reactionary terms. We must criticize the present only to reach a different future (Bloch, 1996). Call that future emancipation, fully automated luxury communism, feminist ecology or whatever you like, the demand of the day is to take a position. We must take that risk, sincerely. The intellectualism of critique must again be enjoined with the older ethos of being critical (i.e. political).

And all this, of course, is the message of contemporary events. The year 2019 hardly represents a uniformly ‘better’ or more ‘secure’ world. Instead, with the Syrian writer Sadallah Wannous, we are ‘condemned to hope’ that ‘what’s happening’ in the world at the moment ‘cannot be the end of history’.¹

Critique of the status quo is needed now more than ever before. But the disasters of today demand a different kind of critique – something ‘post’ critique as we now know it.

Note

1. These remarks from Wannous are widely cited to have been made at the March 1996 World Theatre Day address.

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For the primacy of politics and the social over security

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There are a lot of insecurities circulating in contemporary world politics. That is an ambiguous blessing for critical security studies. This situation sustains the research field by providing a very expansive range of political and policy concerns that can be approached from a security angle: security and aid, security and global warming, security and dataveillance, security and migration, security and borders, security and squatting, security and anxiety, security and insurances, security and weapons proliferation, to name only a few. However, it also implies that critical security studies mirrors the societal diffusion of insecurities and sustains the dispersal of securitizations through its teaching and societal impact despite its critical intentions. This situation is not new but continues to invite the question of how critical security studies can focus on security without building into its security analytics a security colonization of myriad areas of life.

Criticality has taken on different modes, including opposing and normatively hierarchizing the enactment of different security rationales (e.g. human security versus state security), exploring the discriminatory and violent consequences of security practices, and questioning the depoliticizing nature of security practice (e.g. the dominance of technology- and expert-driven knowledge, the enactment of logics of necessity or emergency). However, it has not really addressed how to know security without centring life and matter onto security. This question is particularly challenging since it asks for a security studies that gives (re)conceptualizations of politics and the social primacy over security; or, more bluntly, it asks for a security studies that focuses neither on securitizations nor on the subjects of security. Such a revisiting seems particularly pertinent in a context where the expanding security agenda that partly drove and has been a condition for the success of critical security studies has been heavily institutionalized in world politics.

Two possible pathways spring to mind through which critical security studies can revisit this old question of how to critically account for the processes through which security becomes politically meaningful. The first is to explore ways of understanding security practices, concerns and logics within a social and political situation that is not just or primarily driven by security but made up of entanglings between multiple and heterogeneous practices and concerns. This can be done, for example, by multiplying the actors and/or discourses beyond security-focused ones or by giving primacy to complex analytical categories through which conceptions of politics or the social are mobilized, such as citizenship, freedom, democracy, public, welfare, without reducing or hierarchically subordinating them to security.

A second pathway is to engage and debate the growing literature on post-criticality. This pathway is currently one of the most interesting through which to reopen the question of how social sciences and humanities can be critical. It challenges familiar repertoires of being critical, including the study of entrenched structural and institutional processes of domination and exclusion. By formulating alternative analytics that foreground the enchantments, creativity and resonating fragments of transformation, it analytically fractures entrenched processes and structures. This pathway is not a call for reintroducing the tiresome theory/practice question or a societal impact agenda but for revisiting the limits and possibilities of critique from within critical lineages in security studies.

On the insecurities of security studies

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Prepare to expect the unexpected: this may be the primary if least respected rule of modern politics. That everything changes is the rule that never changes, at least when we privilege human temporalities over eternal perfection. As Machiavelli insisted, temporalities are always dangerous, so timing is everything. They remain dangerous even when converted into signs of predictability and hope, even into more enlightened possibilities for human freedom.

Many claims about security nevertheless try to tame the dangerous by affirming illusions of permanence: some essential trait of human nature; some continuity of statist interest; some restoration of spatialized order from impending chaos; some normalization established through suspensions of norms; some sovereign order cast from self-sacrifice and self-affirmation in the usual Hobbesian manner.

For all their parochialism, contrasting Machiavellian and Hobbesian idealizations of political possibilities remain exemplary. For there can be no security as we now understand it without a sense of what or who is to be secured: statist citizens and/or all humans; liberty and equality; democracy and/or national self-determination; the privileged above all; just those doing the securing; something yet to be articulated. All such values and identities are highly volatile and contested, so what it means to secure them must be highly contingent, even if rhetorical and political advantages accrue to claims about eternal necessities.

Everything changes, but sometimes rapidly, sometimes (very) slowly, even to the point of indiscernibility; so we counterpose glacial structures and frantic fixes, a universalizing History and specific histories. Co-productive oppositions between notions of permanence and change, being and becoming, City of God and City of Man already enable claims about security, conventional and critical. Concepts of security necessarily imply many other concepts and thus the fragility of any autonomous 'security studies'. They also express very basic – civilizational – understandings of what the world is, who 'we' are, how both must be known, how we must be liberated from any natural or theological necessity, and how we must submit to some other kind of human authority. Clausewitz's anxieties about politics have become amplified, not appeased, by all the talk about change, speed and transformation.

The circumstances in which we live are indeed perplexing. Many cherished principles express profound vulnerabilities. Two very large questions are at stake in this respect. One concerns that figure of Man whose supposed liberty, and thus security, is certainly gendered, raced and classed, but especially marks the fateful distinction between humanity as a species and all others, whether God, Nature, World or people refused the status of proper humans. The other concerns the relationship between that humanity in general and politically qualified citizens in particular. Our standard answers to these questions – call them humanism and international relations, respectively – are in deep trouble. What we call security is just one aspect of this trouble.

Beyond this, even our received accounts of what it means to change are themselves changing. If change has now become the norm, the expected condition, what forms of change now constitute change? The quasi-Newtonian figurations of stasis and change, of spatialities and temporalities that have allowed some people to imagine themselves to be potentially free, equal and secure subjects, individually and/or collectively, are scarcely comforting anywhere. The study of security is ever more a symptom of our insecurities.

What is constantly changing? Continuity is!

Ole Wæver

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After what is constant, what is changing and what is constantly changing comes the logically missing fourth: the changing character of continuity, the evolution of non-change. Nothing is ever pure change or pure continuity. Even dynamic periods contain mechanisms limiting change, preserving continuity under changing conditions. Some things are stable because of limited pressure or held in place by countervailing forces. However, an important subset of non-change is politically produced as limit: *securitization*. Securitization is a mode of intervention that blocks something specific and in a specific way: by defining what is not allowed to happen and can therefore be prevented with all means necessary. Securitization is the *selection of non-change*. To assess whether securitization regulates continuity in changing ways, we must look at battles with structural change at stake. Clearly, lots of securitization prevents (or fails to prevent) some specific, confined change. However, in important instances, securitization keeps fundamental change at bay.

In his recent book *Down to Earth*, Bruno Latour (2018) argues that climate denial and other campaigns to block climate politics are driven by the super-rich who skip being part of the same Earth as others and go offshore instead, and are thus closely linked to the extreme acceleration of inequality. These processes that block not climate change but climate *action* are performed rhetorically around threat/defence and from attractive subject positions associated with embodying defence, as seen similarly in the strange convoluted forms of gender politics that target protection of vulnerable groups as threats. Thus, 'defence' as form has decoupled from its objects and become pure form. This, however, does not prevent these 'defensive' actions from having effects powerful enough to ensure continuity of structures as crucial as the material format producing climate change and dominant gender hierarchies.

The contrast to Cold War continuity is striking. Then, struggles centred on principal pathways for political change: political uprisings in Eastern Europe or Soviet influence in Western Europe through military might. Securitization of this East–West frontline was articulated explicitly as a boundary of acceptable change. Thus, key controversies were about the legitimate *extension* of this key conflict – that is, whether the ruling regimes in East and West could paint dissidents as agents of the other side and thus use securitization to prevent change (Wæver, 2003). In Roman Jakobson's (1956) classical formulation, those securitizations operated *metonymically*, scaling up and down – for example, in the West extending an accepted securitization of communism to Eurocommunists and other left-wing parties without Soviet affiliation. Popularized securitization theory accordingly tracked 'exaggerated' threats. Today's frontline of structural change functions in key instances *metaphorically*: the signifier gets disconnected from the threat context and applied without the inner link of old-style securitization. 'Climate change' obtained danger connotations, but these are applied to climate *action* as an alleged threat against freedom (Oreskes and Conway, 2010).

Continuity and non-change are still effected through securitization, only in much more messy and non-linear ways than when this journal started 50 years ago. Those who block unwanted change clearly mobilize fear and danger, but not only are these securitizations often exaggerated – classical observation – but increasingly they take place in completely different registers from the main stakes. On key issues, securitization even takes weirdly inverted forms. In an era of pervasive change, continuity is not the inert 'non-caused'. We must study the production of non-change: how some changes that are highly possible become impossible.

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The new age of ideology

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Security studies has always had an uncomfortable relationship with ideology. Much of traditional security studies – particularly the guise of a science of strategy – reflected a deep suspicion towards ideology. The political attractions of a science of strategy run deep: the idea that in matters of life, death and violence, objective knowledge can displace ideological visions and values remains as powerful today as it was in the 18th century. And although many critical approaches focused initially on challenging ‘Enlightenment’ or ‘positivist’ claims to objectivity and the ideological functions they performed, critique itself remained ambivalent about ideology: Was critique just a negative position, revealing the limits of competing views, or was it the basis for an alternative political project? In a somewhat paradoxical way, the recent concentration on neoliberalism, technification, governmentality and related themes has reinforced the gap between explicitly ideological politics and critical security studies, stressing the powers of ‘liberal reason’ while downplaying the importance of explicitly ideological confrontation.

Today, this ambivalence towards ideology presents a challenge for at least two reasons. First, explicitly and overtly ideological challenges to the prevailing international order are increasingly powerful dimensions of global politics. This goes beyond the challenges from rising powers such as China. It also includes the explicit attacks on liberal principles and political structures posed by radical conservative movements. Explicitly nationalist, these groups reject many of the core principles of liberalism in particular, and often of liberal democracy, as well as the international institutions and order in which they have been embedded. These movements do not simply wish to challenge the hierarchy of the existing order; they challenge the principles of the order itself.

Second, these movements are not simply the resurgence of old-fashioned reaction. Nor are they anti-modern or anti-intellectual. On the contrary, they are often underpinned by philosophic foundations decades in the making. Perhaps most challenging for critical security studies, many of these intellectual frameworks are marked by the explicit appropriation of critical-theoretic themes and insights. From calls to develop a ‘Gramscianism of the right’, to assaults on neoliberal globalization at least as radical as those of many ‘critical’ thinkers, to the explicit embrace of postmodern claims about knowledge and identity, thinkers of the new right are by no means ignorant of ideas that have often inspired theorists of security. On the contrary, they have turned these ideas in explicitly reactionary directions and used them to give theoretical self-consciousness and even inspiration to today’s radical right.

The new right views itself as the vanguard of a ‘nationalist internationalism’ – a movement of mutually supporting nationalist movements. It seeks to create class, race or group self-consciousness on the part of the objects of its analysis. Narrating the global history of the ‘enemy’ of liberal elitism is an essential component of this strategy, as are myths of an essentialized nation that is needed to overcome its liberal adversary. One of the emerging challenges on the security landscape thus lies in a fusion of domestic and international – an invocation of class, race, gender, nation and civilization – that seeks to mobilize security and insecurity to destabilize many of the taken-for-granted values and assumptions that, for better or worse, have dominated the horizons of both the liberal world order and its critics. Intellectually, culturally and politically, this is a challenge that cannot be ignored.

Towards alternative security futures?

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Critical security studies needs to address the grounded ways in which marginalization, dispossession and expropriation take place. This means tackling issues of racism, colonialism and imperialism directly, alongside other forms of marginalization, such as those related to class, gender, sexuality, ableism, etc. Critical security studies aligns directly with the critique lobbed against Foucauldian security studies by Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit (2019), who argue that race and colonialism are inadequately addressed in critical security studies. They call for an approach that attends to the constitutive role of racism and colonialism in the construction of the modern human subject. Not doing so, they argue, whitewashes history by reifying the idea of a generalizable or unspecified human, thus reinforcing 'white fantasies of racial innocence' (Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2019: 13). While work in critical security studies gestures towards racialization, they argue that it does not decentre whiteness at its core.

To make their important intervention, Howell and Richter-Montpetit draw on the work of black studies, and black feminist and postcolonial and decolonial thought. As their call gets taken up, we need to also consider how other groups are racialized – for example, Asians, Latinos or Arabs, as well as how the latter are often conflated with Muslims. This is not simply to add other Others to the mix, but to attend to how racialization is co-constituted across different groups. This is exemplified in the work of Lisa Lowe (2015), who illustrates how settler colonialism and slavery mobilized other forms of racism – for example, through the disposability of Chinese labour. Lowe's work is also important in that it is invested in a deep critique of capitalism and markets. This attention to the private sector needs to be brought into Howell and Richter-Montpetit's critique of the state, an amendment that is especially necessary in the present era of securitization and financial neoliberalism.

Finally, critical security studies needs also to engage with alternative ways of thinking about security. This requires moving beyond critiques of racism and its institutionalization, to address agency, possibility and future-making. Recent indigenous scholarship has foregrounded resistance and resurgence, as in Leanne Simpson's (2011) *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* and Nick Estes's (2019) *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. Others insist on the need to refuse futures that are contained and circumscribed by settler-colonial frameworks, as is argued in the work of scholars such as Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* and Audra Simpson (2014) in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. From another vantage point, the literature on black place-making insists on attending to the collective struggles to forge a black sense of place that speak back to, or transcend, dominant spatial constructions, a point that Katherine McKittick (2006) argues in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Mark Hunter et al. (2016: 32), for example, show how black people make place in spite of 'assaults on black placemaking from the outside – as in lethal policing and destructive urban planning' as well as 'internal dangers – such as homophobia, harassment, and homicide'. These works all move beyond a focus on victimization, and instead emphasize forms of social organization and political change that refuse liberal aspirations and assert radical claims to alternative futures. What kinds of alternative *security* futures can be envisioned by scholars in critical security studies?

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Recentring security studies: Race and the majority world


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I want to highlight two challenges for further engagement in the field. The first relates to how analysis in security studies can continue to expand the critique of the social production of threat beyond the illiberal practices of liberal states. This project of extending the insights of security studies is already well under way (see, *inter alia*, Wilkinson, 2007), but there is fertile ground for inquiry ahead on questions of theory and methodology. Do concepts of governance, which in critical security studies often draw heavily on the oeuvre of Foucault, translate well in non-Western contexts? How do we study securitization, or the normal politics of security, in contexts where the state is absent or where security is outside the hands of the ‘professionals’ we tend to associate with it? There is a range of excellent research on security practices in non-Western contexts, though much of the conceptual basis for this literature (including in my own work, I admit) relies on the application of concepts from ‘outside’ to new empirical domains. Academic capital flows to those who can show empirical novelty, but we might want to go a step further and think of sites in the ‘majority world’ as being spaces of theory *generation* too. This does not mean we start with a blank slate. We can begin by flipping concepts and descriptors we already take for granted: inverting the idea of ‘security professionals’ to study non-state forms of security provision, or toying with the city-name nomenclature of ‘schools’ in security studies to foreground divergent visions of threat (see Abboud et al., 2018). In turn, this project requires more methodological reflection on the ethics and practicalities of research and fieldwork in and on non-Western spaces. The easier side of this task is to think through how Westerners can generate theory from the majority world; the harder one is to enable researchers from this world to bring their theory to the journals and conferences that too often lie outside it.

The second challenge relates to the question of race, which is paradoxically both central to and absent from security studies. Much of the field’s critical thrust has come from work on limits, borders, migration and othering, and race runs through all of this work, whether it is on refugee governance, on biometrics, or on counter-radicalization. Often, however, the thrust of our work is only on how race might enter into broader rationalities – risk management, profiling, mobility, coloniality. What might we gain by more *explicitly* centring race in our analyses (see Moffette and Vadasaria, 2016)? One contribution might be a greater attentiveness to the historical conditions and premises of security practices, which tends to feature more strongly in cognate fields (e.g. Browne, 2015, in sociology/surveillance studies) than in critical security studies (with some exceptions, such as Gray and Franck, 2018). A key task on the horizon is to apply critical security studies’ methodological tools around processes and constructions of security to racist violences, showing the deep roots of today’s nativisms in Europe or the ways epidermal hierarchies in the Sahel–Sahara shape local and global perceptions of threat in the region. The political commitment of critical security studies to a critique of violence and inequality demands no less.

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Get out of the way: Decolonising security studies

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Whatever ‘turn’ critical security studies has undergone over the last few decades, what often persists is the general scepticism, (still) inspired by post-structuralism, towards any theories that involve claims to origins. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming, which much literature continues to draw on, is a case in point: becoming is defined as being rhizomatic rather than arborescent; it has neither beginning nor end. Arborescence arrests movement, disables indecision, closes down openings and inhibits our understanding ‘that we are always “becoming with” others’ (Austin et al., 2019: 6).

However, the embrace of rhizomatic open-endedness can serve to enshrine rather than challenge domination in particular contexts and in relation to particular histories. One such context is ‘New Worlds’ settler colonialism. As Jodi Byrd (2011: xii–xiv) argues, shying away from the ‘possibility of the originary’ is in danger of reinforcing settler-colonial strategies that precisely rely on a forgetting of ‘the originary historical traumas’ that ‘birthed’ settler colonies. As Byrd (2011: 14) shows, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming is riddled with unacknowledged settler-colonial yearnings for the ‘frontier’ and ‘wilderness’, as well as fantasies of a non-specific ‘Indian without ancestry’ who ‘disappears into rocks and creates paths without memory’ (see Deleuze, 1997: 241). This obscures and possibly even justifies the explicit settler-colonial logic that sets out to make the native *literally* disappear. Byrd challenges us to recognize how the original inhabitants of the New World are neither a mythological ‘empty’ figure that we can invest with our own desires for ‘becoming’, as Deleuze and Guattari do, nor an abstract colonized ‘other’ whom we can draw upon in generic terms to advance the ‘decolonization’ of our disciplines, as is the tendency in one of the latest ‘turns’ to decolonization. Nor are they a concrete ‘other’ whose presence can be accommodated in a framework of becoming-with. Instead, they are ‘the very real lived condition of [settler] colonialism’, its origin and presence, and they need to become ‘foundational’ to our academic and political debates, settings its terms (Byrd, 2011: xx).

What can that mean concretely, both for our analytical and for our political practice? In New Worlds settler-colonial contexts, inclusion on the basis of claims to multiculturalism have become central strategies to enshrine the sovereignty of settler states and to render invisible alternative indigenous claims to self-determination as ‘a people’, rather than as to-be-included individuals (see Simpson, 2014). This has led some indigenous writers on Turtle Island (North America) to forcefully argue for new indigenous strategies of ‘refusal’ and ‘resurgence’: a refusal to become accommodated within existing settler-colonial rationales and a (resurgent) turn towards the ‘grounded normativity’ of one’s own people, which indeed involves a reflection on origins (see, for example, Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014). In such a context, the responsibilities of (white) academics who are based in Western institutions might not lie in decolonizing their disciplines, or conducting research in a spirit of ‘becoming-with’ and togetherness, but in taking their hands off and getting out of the way. And it also entails the recognition that origin stories do not always close down avenues, but in some contexts and in relation to some histories open up new avenues for understanding domination and political struggle.

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The persistent dominance of Western-centrism

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In line with other critical approaches in social theory, critical security studies has been significantly more attentive to, and receptive towards, non-Western realities than more traditional security studies. Bringing security studies beyond Western focuses has been crucial in enabling critical security studies to expand our understanding of security phenomena. Studies drawing upon some African and South American realities, for example, have advanced our knowledge on the privatization of security, the politics of extraction and hybrid security governance. Genuine engagements with non-Western realities and experiences have advocated an explicit and welcomed postcolonial motivation to widen critical security studies, and this has highlighted important dynamics in the field. For example, Abboud et al. (2018: 289) have emphasized the politics of language and translation in critical security studies scholarship, and have shown, among other things, how the Arab state – falling outside the European model of the nation-state, Weberian or Westphalian – was labelled as ‘weak’, ‘absent’ or otherwise ‘fierce’, ‘deep’ and ‘barbarian’.

Yet, despite these efforts, critical security studies remains highly marked by Western-centrism, and this has consequences that are manifested in different ways in its knowledge production processes. This Western-centrism is reflected in a widespread focus on Western empirical cases and non-material ideas, and manifested in the dominant voices in the discipline, in the related editorial teams of key journals, in university curricula, and in the philosophical and historical foundations of key concepts and ideas. Much of what is hardly compatible with concepts that originated in the European political and philosophical tradition remains unexplored (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006), and this aspect is indeed central: the discipline remains insufficiently influenced by non-Western modes of thinking, and realities that are clearly non-Western remain understudied, such as the internal dynamics of tribal contexts (in Kurdistan, Yemen, etc.) or non-material signifiers of security, such as witchcraft, mythology or other rituals, among many other cases. At the same time, engagement with non-Western philosophical traditions could provide valuable insights in relation to contemporary security phenomena. Classical Chinese philosophical ideas around social harmony and hierarchy, for example, could go a long way towards explaining dataveillance policies and opening up the concept of societal security. Additionally, considering that several philosophical traditions and ways of thinking are connected to religious principles and systems of belief, further knowledge of non-Western religious traditions could be important to bring new understandings of why security practices and perceptions change across different contexts.

The postcolonial proposal, then, as a way to ‘explore the capacities and limitations of certain European social and political categories in conceptualizing political modernity’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: 20), remains crucial if critical security studies is to realize its potential. As suggested by Dixit (2014) in the domain of visibility in security studies, adopting a decolonial approach can contribute to identifying invisibilities in dominant narratives. As key to independent thought, then, epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) is fundamental for the intellectual emancipation of critical security studies and for furthering its contribution as an intellectual project.

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Violence, security and the postcolonial subject

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Critical security studies has sought to co-opt the postcolonial into its hegemonic conceptual schema and epistemological regimes of knowledge. These remain essentially unchanged when the postcolonial 'perspective' is simply added rather than seen as having the potential to reconstitute the terms of discourse. Such reconstitution would shift the lens away from security as the predominant analytical category and security practices understood variously in terms of assemblage, field and network. Rather, the focus would turn to violence and its implications for the postcolonial international. I argue that the concerns of any conceptual and substantive postcolonial challenge, if the reconstitution of the terms of discourse is the aim, relate, first, to the perpetration of violence against postcolonial populations and, second, to what such violence does to the structure of the postcolonial international, a historic structure achieved through struggle and contestation.

When the lens falls on the microcosm of security practices, when 'security' is the analytic category, the focus on the material actuality of violence, its impact on the political, is not just left to the margins, but is simply obliterated from the analytical picture. While the predominant interest is on the implications of security practices for liberalism in the West, what is rarely considered, if at all, relates to what such practices do to the postcolonial polity and the international as a distinct location of politics. However, and as argued here, when violence is the analytical category, the questions of what violence does to the postcolonial subject and the postcolonial international become core concerns.

At issue is the distinctiveness of the postcolonial international and whether this terrain of politics is taken into account, or recognized, in our analytics and diagnostics of the present. If this is somehow brushed out of the picture, the very possibility of the postcolonial subject as subject of politics and hence agency is negated, as are the constitutive inequality and historicity that shape the colonial legacy both as a continuity and as the condition of possibility for the violence perpetrated against the postcolonial world (Jabri, 2007, 2013).

The postcolonial subject disturbs the category of security. This becomes meaningless in the face of the constitutive materiality of violence perpetrated against the postcolonial world, in war zones and kill zones, in locations of incarceration, and in every move – including the genocidal violence of transnational entities – that denies the constitutive limits of the international. Our research programme should focus on what violence does to politics when the postcolonial is rendered a biopolitical terrain of operations, when war is used as a technology in the control of populations, when these become the subject of security practices that have race and racialization at their operational core. This is our 21st-century political context: the violence of colonial practices, as Hannah Arendt (2004) saw, comes to inform and enable fascist politics. The use of violence as the currency of politics has profound consequences, not least of which is the unravelling of the postcolonial international, an unravelling that should be the core of our analytical and political concerns.

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Politics of technoscience and (in)security

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In a widely acclaimed article, 'The Ontology of the Enemy', the historian of science Peter Galison (1994) offers a theoretical and methodological intervention into the historical production of enemy figures. I take


Galison's article as a potential scene of encounter between critical approaches to (in)security and engagements with science and technology studies. Galison presents us with several visions of the enemy: the racialized, public representation of the enemy 'other', a quasi-racialized figure of the enemy as anonymous target of aerial attacks, and a non-racialized cybernetic enemy whose humanity was dissolved in the merging with the non-human machine. Notice here how racialization is modulated in different figures of the enemy so that it becomes increasingly effaced as we move from the opposition human/subhuman to that of individual human/anonymous mass and then human/non-human. The shift in language can be read as symptomatic of an absence of race from some engagements with technoscience. While the encounter with science and technology studies has become one of the most productive theoretical and methodological scenes of transversal research, critical work on (in)security and technoscience will need to attend more carefully to racializing mechanisms that produce distinction between human/non-human/less-than-human/inhuman.

How is this to be done? I propose the mundane prefix as a generative device for critical approaches to (in)security. A lot of critical work that has highlighted processes, mechanisms and enactments has focused on suffixes – securitization, militarization, financialization, medicalization, and so on. I take two illustrative prefixes as potential devices for researching the politics of technoscience and insecurity.

First, critical work needs to become more analytically attentive to the prefix 're' – to what gets reconfigured, recomposed or rearticulated. While technologies of (in)security often appear different, novel, unprecedented, critical work needs to reformulate analytical tools that can grasp the reconfiguration and recomposition of discourses, technologies and practices. Critique cannot replicate either the exceptionalism of securitization or the indeterminacy of assemblages. It needs to attend to the heterogeneous recompositions and reconfigurations that produce insecurity and generate racializing effects, to the modes of generative difference that emerge through reconfigurations that are neither new nor old, neither the same nor entirely different. As Ann Laura Stoler (2016: 27) has put it in making the case for recursive history of racial formations, what is at stake is not repetition but 'processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations'.

Second, a different class of prefixes – 'de/dis', 'in' or 'non' – draw attention to ways of decomposing, disjoining or undoing. To undo or decompose is not to negate, exclude, destroy, eliminate or neutralize. These prefixes render contestations and frictions within practices, as the coinage of '(in)security' has already shown. Entanglements of technoscience and (in)security simultaneously assemble subjects and objects that are made knowable, while disassembling or undoing other objects or subjects of knowledge (Aradau, 2017). To approach technoscience and (in)security through the device of the prefix is to simultaneously attend to reconfiguration and disfiguration, reassembling and disassembling, knowing and not knowing.

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Welcoming new materialist characters to security studies

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There is nothing new under the sun, we are told. But perhaps in security studies there is? In fact, from my perspective, security studies has been undergoing massive change. A retrospective look at *Security Dialogue*

would prove the point. We no longer write about the same things in the same way. This change is multifaceted and has complex reasons (obviously), as this horizon scan shows. Here I just want to welcome three new m-characters, namely the *manager*, the *minion* and the *mime*, that have made security studies more interesting, discerning and hopefully also better at imagining political alternatives. Fittingly, these characters have been introduced largely by way of the new *materialisms*.

Introducing new characters is a ploy to make a plot more interesting. It worked for security studies. The introduction of (private and public sector) *managers* of security has led us to explore the commercial processes at the heart of the making of security. It has also led scholars to unfamiliar sites, ranging from the fake journalists trading news about pirates in the Gulf of Aden, to trade fairs in London or the KASOTC military training facility that doubles as a touristic theme park in the Jordan desert (Schuetze, 2017). Similarly, the encounter with the marvellous *minions* has opened up a wide world of infrastructural politics to exploration, sensitizing security studies scholars to the wondrous worlds of codes, algorithms, protocols and other security devices. It has made them aware of the mundane, material, unreflected and often fraught work that sustains security just as it sustains Pignarre and Stengers' (2011) rendition of the capitalist spell or *Despicable Me* (2010). Finally, the new materialisms facilitated the meeting with the *mimes*, that is, theatre actors who express themselves without using language, instead relying on the emotional, affective, embodied and visceral that is beyond the logocentric and linguistic. With this introduction, security studies finds itself facing the full range of sensory practices. The overall result is a vastly expanded relational repertoire of security processes, actors and settings. This is enticing and exciting for us as scholars.

More than interesting, the engagement with managers, minions and mimes makes security studies more discerning. It decentres attention from conventional characters such as ministers, missiles and methods. It does not do this to look behind, beyond or below at some conspiracy. It directs attention to that which is there for all to see but still misrecognized. It pushes the boundaries of knowledge and hence advances and transforms critical work. This matters. The three new m-characters together are crucial for grasping contemporary developments in security (the standard euphemism for the militarization of contemporary life). They assemble and work together: The managers ensure that security markets are soundly growing. The minions *extend* security by anchoring it in the pervasive mundane and often dysfunctional and failing *infrastructural* processes that put us off guard. It all seems insignificant. The mimes add *depth*. They make security a sensory experience. Together, the m-characters can help us unpack the politics of unease generating the contemporary militarization. Working with them is therefore also exceedingly important for thinking up alternatives and finding realistic ways of working towards them. The m-characters are our allies, our oddkin – as Donna Haraway (2016) would say for kin that is not of our own kind – in alter-politics. I would therefore like to welcome them, encouraging them to stay.

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From jaw-jaw to war-war

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One of the most notable developments in the field of critical security studies, and more broadly international relations, over the last decade has been the tangible renewal of interest in the phenomenon of war. This vital reinvigoration in the study of war necessarily entails a significant break with some of the prevailing conceptual and methodological assumptions that attended the initial founding of critical security studies.

The original critical move of the 1990s, whether in its Copenhagen, Aberystwyth or Paris variants, was to insist on a 'deepening' and 'broadening' of the concept of security beyond the conventional national state

frame that had dominated throughout the Cold War. From this perspective, the study of ‘guns and bombs’ was considered retrograde for reifying the state’s construction of security, even ultimately standing in the way of a more emancipatory politics. Moving away from traditional approaches to security would instead allow for a sustained theoretical interrogation of the concept of security and critical deconstruction of the ways in which particular issues, activities and groups become the focus of security practices. In accordance with the linguistic turn prevalent at the time, security was primarily apprehended as a discourse, an inter-subjective construction that posited both the ‘referent object’ to be secured and those entities deemed to pose an existential threat to it.

While these epistemological and methodological commitments produced a profuse array of empirical studies and philosophical reflections that have enriched our understanding of the significations attached to ‘security’ and their political valences, they were poorly suited to account for the brute materiality and embodiment of war, which correspondingly disappeared from view altogether. The phenomenon of war was de facto relegated to a second-order effect of securitization, almost as if war would simply disappear of its own accord if security thinking was definitively undone. As it happens, over two decades of critical security studies have patently done little to arrest processes of societal securitization that are arguably more rampant than ever today, while both new and old expressions of martial life continue to proliferate across our shrinking world.

A return to war cannot evidently be synonymous with restoring the narrow, instrumentalist variety of security studies that critical security studies was rightly critical of in the first place, but must instead be a site of unrestricted empirical exploration and theoretical elaboration. A crucial opening salvo came with Barkawi and Brighton’s (2011) call for a ‘critical war studies’ that would fully grant the martial phenomenon its generative powers. The subsequent emergence of ‘critical military studies’ has likewise brought our attention back to military institutions and the particular place they occupy in our societies. Much work still remains to be done, however, if we are to grapple fully with the myriad ways in which we live in a world shaped by the past experience, present exercise and future anticipation of armed conflict. Above all, an unbounded engagement with war holds the promise of escaping the endless conceptual hermeneutics to which the notion of security has been subjected, in favour of radical empirical encounters with an obdurately confounding object whose provocations cannot but demand of us new experiments in thought.

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What is constant in the circulation of weapons?

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Debate about weapons circulation is marked by two linked forms of presentism: chrono-political presentism and technological fetishism. The former manifests in the rise of the discourses of human security, securitization, new wars, and failed and fragile states that accompanied the end of the Cold War. The latter is evident in a predominant concern with the newness of technologies, from unmanned drones to killer robots to sixth-generation jet fighters. These two forms of presentism have been accompanied and facilitated by a shift in (critical) security studies as a field – and indeed in our own journal. *Security Dialogue* began life as the *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*: the move towards a post-positivist and self-consciously critical concern with security signalled a transition away from a concern with militarism and positivist (if left-leaning and peace-oriented) approaches to militarization. This epistemological and methodological shift was necessary, but in the process there was a move away from analysis of war and military power. The predominant attention to

newness and change in the field glosses over what is constant in the phenomenon of weapons circulation, namely, power, asymmetry and contestation, even if their form changes across space and time.

What counts as a weapon changes across space and time, but the use of force and resistance remain constant. This is partly about technological innovation: weapons we could not have imagined in the past are now real, and imagining the future is a key theme in weapons development. But it's more than that. It's about *weaponizing* objects for purposes of violence, control and resistance: from the development of barbed wire in the late 19th-century colonization of the American West (Netz, 2004) to the agricultural fertilizer used to make improvised explosive devices in contemporary Afghanistan. In some ways, the materiality of weapons is constant, even if our emotional or affective responses to them change. Who's afraid of nuclear war? Not as many people as used to be. Yet the weapons are still there: they don't go away just because we're not (as) afraid of them any longer – indeed, some of them are degrading and becoming *more* dangerous. This is the reverse of the social construction of threat that we tend to focus on in our critical analyses of, for example, terrorism. Critical scholars have been better at suggesting what we shouldn't be frightened of than what we perhaps ought to be.

Where and how weapons circulate changes, but the gendered, racialized and (post)colonial character of circulatory dynamics within and between states in the global North and South persist. The centrality of colonialism and racialized, gendered and sexualized violence to the history and contemporary practices of capitalist modernity makes asymmetric encounters, the use of weapons of the weak and domination dressed up as benevolence by liberal powers continuous themes. Whether our concern is with the use of air power by the Saudi-led coalition to try to bomb and starve the population of Yemen into submission, with its historical resonances with British air power in the Middle East (Blumi, 2018), or with the USA's problem with gun violence, violence that is not only gendered but also deeply racialized and whose contemporary manifestations bear the ongoing traces of settler colonialism and slavery (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2018), attention to historical lines of racialized, (post)colonial and gendered dynamics of weapons circulation seems as urgent as ever.

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Recentering violence and its limits?

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Violence fascinates, motivates, scares and moves me, as it does many other critical security scholars. Its constant presence compels me to do the work that I do, and to critically reflect on the politics and ethics of doing so.

In our interrogation of security (and, here, 'our' refers to the community of critical security scholars loosely defined), we *also* both explicitly and inexplicitly engage with the question of violence – its provenance, processes and legitimacy, as well as its effects. Clearly, violence is imbedded in security in myriad ways and is vital in rendering both insecurity and security dangerous, as well as so central to life (see, for example, Burke, 2007). However, in taking stock of 50 years of 'debating security' in *Security Dialogue*, it

strikes me that, collectively, we have decentred a continuing intellectual critical query of violence and its relation to security and insecurity.

A wealth of critical scholarship has taught us that violence has to do with limits and their violations, including the violation of bodies and the destruction of human lives; with killing and maiming, starving, demeaning; with turning humans into a ‘thing’ (Weil, 2006); with harm and injury. We know that it is inherent in the production of (political) subjects, bodies and orders, and that it works through other processes and relations that are both seemingly innocuous and clearly harmful. Indeed, we can see the very tangible marks of its productive power and of its destructive traces. And we can be walloped by, moulded through or die slowly of the quiet and invisible stealth of its force.

Yet, I wonder, do we ‘know violence well enough?’ (Zalewski and Runyan, 2013: 297) as we insert it or hold it as a backdrop or ultimate stake in our discussions of security and insecurity? This is not to say that no critical security studies scholars focus on violence; that would be silly (see Burke, 2007; Evans and Lennard, 2018). My concern has to do with the way we seem to latch on to a certain conceptualization of violence (informed, for example, by the work of Agamben, Arendt, Balibar, Butler, Fanon, Foucault, etc.) and then – with that conceptualization firmly tucked into our scholarly toolbelt – we move on to look at its effects, its productive and destructive power of subjects, lives and orders; notice its different forms (structural, normative, direct, sexual, military, political, etc.); its logics; how other concepts/practices (such as security, militarism, war, peace, gender, race, the sexual) enable, serve it, render it legitimate or illegitimate. Yet, in this, violence appears as somehow already known. It is not posed as an open-ended question.

Given its centrality to our many collective concerns, and the vast, creative, hidden, subtle, ambiguous and screaming ways in which harm and injury are afflicted and experienced, violence pervades our continuing and increasingly interdisciplinary discussions about the politics and ethics of security. How, then, can we creatively recentre violence and its limits – not instead of, but in relation to security – as sustained subjects of critical inquiry? This, I believe, surfaces as one of the key questions as we consider the horizon of critical security studies; and my tentative response can only be a methodological one that suggests yet another question: Where, when, why, how and to what effect are the limits of violence being drawn?

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Juridification, criminalization and lawfare in humanitarian space

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Security studies must shift the theoretical gaze from international humanitarian law to the law and the lawyering of humanitarian action (Krasmann, 2012; Sullivan, 2014). Humanitarian actors are increasingly controlled and held accountable through legal or quasi-legal mechanisms and criminalization practices – and through lawfare.

Humanitarian action has become a transnational space regulated through a thickening framework of soft law (such as handbooks, standard operating procedures, codes of conduct, guidelines, declarations and principles), host-state regulations, contractual agreements and court cases (Lohne and Sandvik, 2017). Humanitarian actors must manage multiple jurisdictions, legal systems and dispute-settlement mechanisms. In recent years, there has been a small but discernible trend towards litigation on humanitarian

issues focusing on the accountability of humanitarian actors to beneficiaries and donors, but also for duty of care towards staff (Sandvik, 2018).

Criminalization includes processes through which states, media, humanitarians or citizens define particular groups and practices as criminal or as crime, as well as uses of penal power to sanction violations of public law and harm to public welfare (Cook, 2011). The use of penal and quasi-penal legal approaches amounts to a series of sorting exercises of activities legitimately accepted as humanitarian aid (not violating counter-terrorism measures, bans on proselytizing), the permitted organization of aid activities (measures against money-laundering and corruption), and the changing demarcations of legitimate encounters between humanitarian practitioners and between practitioners and beneficiaries (involving bans on harassment, sexual exploitation and violence by humanitarian workers). Criminalization can also be understood as a progress narrative that includes the criminalization of wartime rape, the safeguarding against unlawful behaviour by staff (harassment, sexual exploitation, violence) and initiatives to tackle corruption (e.g. in food aid or refugee resettlement).

However, from the perspective of the sector, criminalization more often represents a narrative of decline of the humanitarian space and the ability of actors to deliver 'principled humanitarian aid'. This includes restrictive NGO laws and the merging of security policies, migration control and criminal justice, whereby organizations and professional and volunteer humanitarians are punished for assisting displaced individuals, as well as a criminalization of displaced people's self-protection mobility strategies, thereby perpetuating criminalization of poor people and deviant male youths. Finally, criminalization is gradually becoming intertwined with a lawfare paradigm, where US counter-terrorism measures and 'material support to terror' provisions are being globalized through strategic litigation against humanitarian actors in domestic courts coupled with blacklisting of the same humanitarian actors in global banking systems. Importantly, the barriers to entry are low, allowing some cause lawyers to use complaint mechanisms for strategic litigation purposes. Moreover, a potential extension of this type of lawfare would be the incorporation of civil society digital procurement of (Chinese-produced) commercial off-the-shelf solutions of hardware, platforms and networks as a (US) national security issue: this would greatly up the stakes for humanitarian actors.

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Security, a problem of uncertain life!

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Perhaps the most exciting development in security studies from the late 1990s has been to see how the idea was released from the technical halls of defence and diplomacy and came to be thought in relation to conceptions of order, power and governance in the everyday world. Rescuing the politically related character of security, however, remained trapped within the Schmittian characterization of the political in terms of the friend–enemy distinction and the problem of survival (Schmitt, 1976). This has framed the wider debate of

security discourses and practices in terms either of differences in degrees of protection and vulnerability/exposure, or of the coexistence of categorical differences in kinds of security (the so-called widened agenda). An alternative to this Bergsonian distinction (see Bergson, 1992: 206) has simultaneously begun to develop. Rather than operating the zero-sum logic of survival, it proceeds upon an understanding of politics as the concerted art of managing uncertainty (Lobo-Guerrero, 2010: 18). Whereas the two ideas of security and risk have in common their relationality with the promotion and protection of ways of being in the world, uncertainty and its related practices of risk analysis and management understand danger as events that correlate probabilities and impacts (Aradau et al., 2008). In the presence of risk-based approaches to security, a logic of survival coexists and gives space to one of profit and loss framed within capitalist economic systems. As a result, traditional sciences of security since the end of the Cold War compete and coexist with those of risk management and insurance, and political practice in liberal economies has consolidated as one of governing through risk (Lobo-Guerrero, 2010).

So far, the analysis of security as a logic of promotion and protection of ways of being in the world renders itself as useful and applicable. It allows for the creation of frameworks for analysis, supports comparisons of kinds and degrees, and facilitates indexes to measure levels of in/security. However, conceptions of what life is are complicating the understanding of what it means to be in the world. We are only beginning to comprehend the impacts of the confluence of the digital and molecular revolutions of the late 20th century (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero, 2009). Advances in molecular biology challenge the historicity of life upon which the linearity of development operates. The advent of the digital has opened up a new domain of interaction and coexistence that resists the path-dependency analyses derived from the landed, maritime and aerial domains with which we have become familiar. We are only starting to make sense of the role of quantum mechanics in relation to matter and how this changes the ways we understand order. The ever-delayed advent of quantum computation promises to open up our comprehension of complexity, connectivity and circulation as quasi-transcendental categories for the understanding of governance.

All these transformations have permanently changed the referential basis of security: life itself. The challenge lies now in how to understand security, not conceptually as if devoid of active history, but as a problem of being that might not be necessary. Perhaps we are reaching a moment where what needs to be understood is not security but our need to think of order, power and governance in relation to it.

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Infrastructural geopolitics

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We are in the middle of a global payments infrastructure war. Since 2015, the global payment infrastructure SWIFT has been weaponized by the USA and the EU in order to fortify sanctions against Iran. The disconnection of Iranian banks from the SWIFT network is currently blamed for lack of aid capacity in the midst of the 2019 Iranian floods.

Like other themes in a broad, emerging field called 'financial security' (Boy et al., 2017), the payment infrastructure war largely remains under the radar of scholars in critical security studies. It is a technical, economic, seemingly bloodless war that lacks visible hurt. The infrastructure war, dependent as it is on quotidian datamining and the mundane decisions of mid-level compliance officers, seems altogether too small

and insignificant to count as part of global geopolitics. Yet it is the very battleground of one of the most pressing security issues of our time, namely, the cancellation of the Iran nuclear deal.

How can observations of the ‘small’ of quotidian transactions analysis practices at banks or data companies tell us something about the ‘big’ of contemporary geopolitics? More generally, how can ethnographic precision be made compatible with analysis of structural injustice and inequity? Furthermore, how can engagement with a field of practice be made compatible with critical distance?

I suggest that analysis at the intersection of the ‘small’ and the ‘big’ of global politics is a key challenge for critical security studies and its futures. In this intervention, I offer three thinking-points – after Leander (2008) – that develop the notion of ‘infrastructural geopolitics’ as one way of addressing this challenge.

First, the detailed empirical attention and practical engagement that critical security studies has developed with its field of study should be welcomed as a practice of care. It stems from new understandings of where security is situated. Studies at the intersection between security studies and science and technology studies redeploy reflexive, ethnographic methods to foster attention to everyday security practices. As Latour has taught us: the dwarf in the story is not necessarily a smaller character than the giant. But this approach leaves us with the question: How to capture the big? Have we been good enough at speaking to the structural, such as racializations, colonialism and inequalities?

The notion of ‘infrastructural geopolitics’ could be one way of rendering visible the technical/financial battleground of global geopolitics. Such an approach draws attention to a depoliticized geopolitics that does not operate through grand ideological claims, but that builds political community through infrastructural dis/connections (Opitz and Tellmann, 2015). It builds on thinkers, like Mukerji (2010: 404), who argue that infrastructural projects ‘use the material world’ to ‘shape the conditions of possibility for collective life’. Such a reading brings into view the colonial histories of infrastructural rule and the intimate commerce/security nexus of modern statebuilding, enacted through companies like the Dutch VOC.

A final thinking-point asks how to cultivate a mode of critique beyond denunciation. Can the *careful* and *caring* focus on situated practices simultaneously deliver radical critique of ‘big’ structural inequities when needed? An infrastructural geopolitics seeks to *follow* its objects of analysis. It shifts the terrain of critique from positionality to dynamic evaluation. As argued in the *Security Dialogue* 50th anniversary special issue, critique is not a matter of debunking but a matter of caring – constituting an ‘adventure’ ‘from which none of the words which serve as our reference points should emerge unscathed’ (Stengers, 2011: 15).

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(In)security data as matters of care

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Digital data matter for (in)security practice. And yet they remain ‘neglected things’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011) in critical studies on security. Certainly, critical security studies regularly enquires into the deployment of data-driven systems and the power rationalities that they foster (Amoore, 2013; Bigo, 2014; De Goede, 2018). In its diversity, this literature contributes to questioning the all-too-common assumption at the core of security projects, namely, that data offer the ultimate foundations for meaningful sovereign decisions and actions. However, critical security studies remains primarily concerned with the diverse techniques for governing through data. Too attentive to the politics of algorithms and data circulation, critical security studies scholars fail to explore the

politics underpinning the becoming of data as (in)security things. In particular, we should further explore how data are objectified as (in)security data, and how this affects our own subjectification.

Critical security studies should approach these ‘neglected things’ as ‘matters of care’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011). Latour (2004) famously suggested thinking things in terms of ‘matters of concern’ rather than ‘matters of fact’. While this approach permits us to cater for the (often tense) work put into the construction of a given reality, it risks overlooking less obvious practices of (in)security. Borrowing from feminist scholarship and science and technology studies, Puig de la Bellacasa’s notion of ‘matters of care’ reignites the critical purchase of ‘thinkpolitics’ and ‘thingpolitics’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011: 88). As she puts it, ‘care connotes attention and worry for those who can be harmed by an assemblage but whose voices are less valued, as are their concerns and need for care’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011: 92). Attention to matters of care would supplement existing critical security studies approaches. For example, our research would be less concerned with denaturalizing the role of the digital than about approaching data as deeply entangled with human beings. That is, studying how data – and not only humans – are governed and made to act, and how some of their – and our data subjects’ – ‘voices’, ‘concerns’ and ‘need[s]’ are attended to and others disregarded.

For critical security studies, exploring techniques to govern data means caring for the socio-material practices through which digital data come to matter as (in)security data. Forget – for one second – algorithms. Think about data structures. Consider governmental initiatives around the world. Many are about creating data lakes and decentralized systems, capturing commercial datasets in real time, or ensuring interoperability among legacy databases. Data have to be generated, formatted, curated, integrated and protected for any system to become and remain operational. This unglamorous work keeps busy many actors – security agencies, private companies, IT infrastructures, privacy legislation, etc. Engaging (in)security data as matters of care invites us to unpack the tensions, negotiations and ruses in the socio-material and cognitive becoming of digital data. It is about asking how they are turned into valuable (in)security data and how they are demoted, erased or recycled. Ultimately, it is about asking who cares about what – and thus what critical security studies cares about – in our data worlds.

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Algorithms of insecurity

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It is fitting that the internet grew out of a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency programme, since warfare and processes of securitization are increasingly located in digital space – that third space that is everywhere and nowhere (Abbate, 2000). Wars are gamed on computers; drones are controlled via computers; satellite surveillance turns physical spaces and objects into digital representations; and great powers fear attacks by digital viruses as much as attacks by missiles or soldiers. Increasingly, to be at war is to be staring into a screen.

In these brief comments, I spotlight one actor in this digital world: algorithms (Besteman and Gusterson, 2019). Merriam-Webster defines an algorithm as ‘the set of rules a machine (and especially a computer) follows to achieve a particular goal. It does not always apply to computer-mediated activity, however’.¹ I will focus here on three kinds of algorithms: those that might direct autonomous weapons, especially drones; those that simulate the performance of weapons, especially nuclear weapons; and those that surveil populations and control their movements.

The US military is now investing considerable resources in developing autonomous smart drones (Scharre, 2018). These could operate in self-coordinating swarms, making directional and targeting decisions faster than humans could. Some researchers, such as Ronald Arkin, have suggested such drones would not be swayed by human passions and could be programmed with ‘ethical algorithms’ that might make them behave more in accord with the norms of just war than drones remotely piloted by humans. Critics, highlighting the saying ‘garbage in, garbage out’, have responded by pointing out that an algorithm is only as good as the data it is fed, and by asking who would be legally and morally responsible if a drone committed a war crime.

The USA has not tested a complete nuclear weapon since 1992, yet it has about 5000 of them. How does the USA know these weapons would work if used, given that the plutonium in their cores has aged and decayed and many of the parts have been replaced, often with differently manufactured components? The answer is that the performance of the weapons is modelled on massive supercomputers that have transformed the violent detonation of a physical weapon into the digital crunching of millions of algorithms. Nuclear deterrence has in a very real sense become algorithmic (Gusterson, 2001).

Advanced industrial societies are increasingly concerned that domestic securitization is threatened by the free, un surveilled movement of people – both their own people and those seeking to enter from outside – and have deployed algorithmic technologies in response. These technologies use biometric scanning interfaced with databases to regulate passage at borders and predictive algorithms to assign people to do-not-fly lists. ‘Fusion centres’ algorithmically merge data from different sources to identify people of concern (Amoore, 2017).

As each case illustrates, algorithms create knowledge regimes that exceed the power of human cognitive processing and shift agency from people to computers. The human security problem of coming decades will be to find ways to build flexibility, accountability and human control into emergent systems.

Note

1. See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/algorithm> (accessed 27 May 2018).

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Our scholarly desires and international relations’ constant turning

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What is constant is the desire for *changing*. There has been a dizzying array of ‘turns’ over the last ten years in critical international relations – to practices, emotions, materiality, and so on. The question I’d like to open up is this: To what extent is the seemingly unassuageable desire for newness that drives this never-ending turning the product of one especially potent political economic structure that these turns ultimately help mask

and indeed produce, namely, capitalism itself? Are we not, as scholars, in espousing this desire, stepping into the very subject-position capitalism prescribes of us, which requires things to be destroyed so that they may be recreated *as if* from scratch? Capitalism, we know, feeds off dissolving all that is solid into air and fetishizing newness for its own sake, whose correlate is the urge to wipe the slate clean and to dismiss what has been done, all the old methods, as ‘passé’ (Baumann, 2000). I wonder whether, as scholars, we are simply being good capitalist consumers-cum-producers, in constantly churning out these new turns, and in embracing the desire that has us throw out the old and look for the new, always.

This spurning of the old in order to keep desiring the new is true in general for capitalism; this is how it has worked from the onset. But today there is something more at stake, in an age where everything is dissolving into big data, where our behaviours are becoming increasingly invested in as the locus of production of the ‘black gold’ of a new form of ‘surveillance capitalism’ (Zuboff, 2019). In international relations, we have ended up turning to some of the very things this mode of production demands from us, such as emotions. On the platforms where we increasingly meet and buy online, we are also relentlessly encouraged to rate and to emote. Our emotions are put to work to produce the data required to surveil and indeed impact our consumptive behaviours (Andrejevic, 2011).

Are we merely becoming consuming scholars in our ceaseless quest to turn away, or to turn anew? My question, to unpack it a bit more, is whether, in our own scholarly practices, we are unknowingly reproducing structural injunctions that defeat a critical positionality, by pursuing research questions that simply reproduce, rather than challenge, status quo structures whose inequalities are being fast entrenched by the new algorithmic data regimes (Epstein, 2015; O’Neil, 2017). If so, then scholarly responsibility requires us to be careful to demarcate our own desire to explain the world from the desires expected of us by neoliberal surveillance. Stillness may be one response – deepening rather than more turning.

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Teaching as a site of critique

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As scholars, we are now teaching, writing and doing critique in a time where the concept of ‘constructed knowledge’ has become weaponized in service to misogyny and hatred. We are critical scholars at a cultural turn that devalues the very idea of critique as an elitist and ideological agenda. Relatedly, the vocabulary used by critical security studies scholars and the sorts of questions we ask have suddenly become present in popular discourses. Unfortunately, their quotidian use by celebrity provocateurs is usually without good understanding or good faith. Terms like ‘feminist’ and ‘postmodernist’ are being used as inelegant insults levied at supposedly out-of-touch liberal academics. This seems to be part of a larger effort to mischaracterize the nature and undermine the validity of important work in key areas of critique (Mirrlees, 2018). It is tempting to be dismissive towards these anti-intellectual forces, but their growing influence can be linked to a rise in hate crimes against marginalized groups and increasing electoral successes by divisive populist figures (Edwards and Rushin, 2018).

It is here that I would argue for the importance of teaching and for our vital role as educators. Within this cultural milieu, there is an opening that urgently requires us to articulate complex ideas and nuance for ‘popular’ audiences – which include our students and our larger communities. For those of us who are privileged enough to do so, we have opportunities to address – armed with far more expertise than the popular pundits

are – the regressive politics emerging around knowledge itself. The challenge for the critical scholar now is to engage carefully with existing discourses and to present artfully the value of critique as a starting point for a functioning politics. We need to think about the role of scholars as more than just publishers of obscure research written for other scholars – but also as *educators* who are willing to engage with the world.

Relatedly, my own exposure to the field of critical security studies came with ontological and epistemological questions around the lacunae of critique itself. What was it for? And why were we doing it? How could we answer these questions without obedient appeals to the very foundational assumptions that critical security studies seeks to critique? These queries went on to animate my research (Mustapha, 2013) and continue to heavily influence my ideas about the importance of teaching. Notably, though, I am no longer a member of just a small group of critical scholars trying to have these conversations. Rather, these sorts of questions are increasingly being asked and articulated by a growing number of critical security studies scholars, as the contents of the 50th anniversary special issue of *Security Dialogue* illustrate (see Austin et al., 2019), even as we continue to take seriously a baseline commitment to the premise of situated and constructed knowledges.

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Questioning orthodoxies

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A constant feature of critical security studies is the questioning of predominant presuppositions in traditional/orthodox security studies and security politics. Such questioning can be conducted in many ways – from structuralist or totalizing accounts *à la* Marx, to post-structuralist 'deconstruction' *à la* Foucault and Latour (Koddenbrock, 2014). The latter approaches are currently reflected in certain pragmatist, feminist, postcolonial, new materialist and post-humanist contributions to critical security studies. Reinforced by increased attention to research methods, these contributions not only have introduced refreshing theoretical perspectives but have also invigorated empirical analysis in the field.

The post-structuralist tendency in critical security studies is criticized by Koddenbrock (2014) and Nunes (2012), among others, for not producing insights that can be used for substantive political analysis or the prescription of political alternatives (see also Hynek and Chandler, 2013). Yet, only if post-structural approaches are isolated from other approaches would this criticism be valid. When they interact with the broader field of security studies, their dismantling of paradigmatic conceptions like security, violence, liberty and agency may yield highly constructive results. Indeed, Foucault and Latour generated reactions and renewal within liberalist and Marxist orthodoxies across a range of disciplines, in addition to inspiring their own disciples. Moreover, their empirical research into details that bedevilled established truths both produced new knowledge about, for example, states and laboratories and enrich our understanding of politics and science in general.

A classic distinction between the sciences and humanities is that the sciences search for universals while the humanities seek the unique. In this sense, the deconstruction of universal concepts and theories in security studies opens for theories and methods from the humanities that can probe further into the distinctiveness of ideas and practices of security. That said, the humanities – like the social sciences – are better

conceived as evolving through a dialectic between the universal and the particular, structural and chaotic, constructive and deconstructive. In effect, the work of scholars can be placed on a continuum between these opposites, rather than being confined to mutually exclusive camps. In this respect, deconstruction may also serve the social scientific quest for the right universals of security studies.

In his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson argues that too much explanation in the behavioural sciences relies on heuristic, ‘imperfectly defined’ notions like ‘ego’, ‘anxiety’, ‘instinct’, ‘purpose’, ‘mind’ and ‘self’. Generating research bubbles premised on subject-specific concepts in passing, the result is ‘a mass of quasi-theoretical speculation unconnected with any core of fundamental knowledge’ (Bateson, 1972: 5). When Foucault and Latour, like Nietzsche, Heidegger and the late Wittgenstein, heretically confront dichotomies like mind–body, subject–object, idea–practice and culture–nature, it can thus be of great service to scientific endeavours by alerting us to fragilities in the building blocks of established theories. Indeed, their arguments do not rest on mystical speculation but on what Bateson describes as the fundamentals of science, like causation, substance, time, space and order – even if they question predominant representations of these as well (see Latour, 2005: 248). Rather than undermining security studies, the deconstruction of prevalent conceptions can therefore be a blessing to this field, facilitating dialogues and confrontations between the humanities and the social sciences that enrich security studies rather than leaving it closed off as a discipline of its own.

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What is constantly changing? The concept of security

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Without ‘security’ there would no *Security Dialogue*. There would be no security studies to have a ‘dialogue’ within. There would be no security studies to revise and expand by making it ‘critical security studies’ or ‘feminist security studies’ or ‘x security studies’. There would be no conceptual centre that competing concepts such as risk and resilience could critique and constitute themselves in relation to (Balzacq, 2015).

‘Security’ did not always inhabit such a privileged position. Before ‘security’ there was ‘peace’. Peace research during the Cold War came in as many variations as there are ‘critical securities’ today, and with as many points of contention. It is impossible to capture the genesis and success of the widening–deepening conceptions of security in the late 1980s and early 1990s without a genealogical incorporation of the peace past of (critical) security studies (Buzan and Hansen, 2009). As any good genealogist would tell you, to comprehend the present is to trace the continuities as well as the moments that have vanished from how history is told. It is to show where contingencies and agency have made their marks.

The 50th anniversary of *Security Dialogue* fits this story perfectly. The journal rose from the Cold War ashes in September 1992 as then editor Magne Barth (1992) announced that this first issue of *Security Dialogue* marked the end of *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*. *Security Dialogue* would work ‘at a more ambitious international level’ and was ‘launched in a period of dramatic historical change’. Yet, why that required

'security' rather than 'peace' was not explicitly addressed. What Barth did point out was that *Security Dialogue's* conceptual focus would be 'distinct from traditional notions of national military security'.

It was not self-evident in 1992 that 'security' would come to inhabit so much of the conceptual space previously held by 'peace'. It was also not self-evident that 'security' would become as varied, contested and hyphenated as it did. *Security Dialogue* has played an important and performative part in turning the conceptual potential that 'security' held in the immediate aftermath of the ending of the Cold War into a rich and established field of knowledge production.

It is difficult to imagine that 'security' and (critical) security studies would have become so successful had it not been for the latter's flexible, contested and multifaceted conceptualizations. 'Security' has been constantly changing, and it must be constantly changing for it to keep its spot, also in the title of *Security Dialogue*.

The post-Cold War success of 'security' should also be understood genealogically in that influential critical writings have connected back to earlier work by Arnold Wolfers (1952) and others on the political status of the concept (Wæver, 1995). 'Security' refers to a political logic of drama, urgency and the right to the use of extraordinary measures, as Ole Wæver (1995) famously put it. This raises the question whether there are limits to conceptual change. 'Security' might be constantly changing, but how far can the concept be disentangled from a political logic of urgency before it loses its capacity to name journals and fields of study?

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