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# 1

## INTRODUCING CRITICAL SECURITY METHODS

*Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal and Nadine Voelkner*

### **Theory and method in critical security studies**

Critical security studies (CSS) is now an established field of scholarship. Central to CSS is the shared assumption that security threats and insecurities are not simply objects to be studied or problems to be solved, but the product of social and political practices. CSS aims to understand how those practices work and their social and political implications.

Critical security scholars have challenged the theoretical and normative assumptions of traditional security scholarship and have analysed security practices in a variety of transnational sites. They have created an intellectual space in which research on diverse theoretical and empirical aspects of security and insecurity has flourished. CSS research now covers practices as diverse as the constitution of fear in popular culture and advertising (Weldes 1999), environmental degradation (Dalby 2002), the securitization of global health and disease (Elbe 2010; Voelkner 2011), the securitization of migration (Huysmans 2006) and asylum (Lavenex 2001), the commodification of security (Leander 2005; Abrahamsen and Williams 2006), the proliferation of risk calculation and management (Lobo-Guerrero 2007; Salter 2008; Aradau and van Munster 2007; van Munster 2009; Neal 2009), or practices of surveillance (Lyon 2002), to name just a few.

The proliferation of sites of interest for CSS scholars has entailed important questions of method, of how to deploy concepts in these empirical sites. How should an analysis of securitization be completed? How does one locate and analyse particular practices as 'security'? How does a security field relate to a field of surveillance? How can we analyse the relation between security and risk? These and many other questions require not just theoretical sophistication, but also methodological development. The debates over the conceptualization of security – as speech act, discourse, field of professionals, *dispositif*, or practice – have been

supplemented by methodological questions. Over the past few years, a series of books have tackled the challenge of methodology, of how to analyse security practices. After having been associated with the positivism of much of traditional security studies, method is back on the agenda of CSS. This book intervenes in this new arena of debate by proposing a different understanding of method and developing new frameworks for analysis for CSS scholars.

Lene Hansen's *Security as Practice* (Hansen 2006), for many years the only sustained treatise on methodology in CSS, has now been joined by Laura Shepherd's *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (Shepherd 2013), and Mark Salter and Can Mutlu's collection *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies* (Salter and Mutlu 2012). At the same time, an increasing number of books have tackled method and methodology in international relations (IR) more generally (for a discussion, see Aradau and Huysmans 2013).

Hansen's methodology of discourse analysis aims to 'take methodology back' for poststructuralist analyses of identity and foreign policy (Hansen 2006: xix). In her view, methodology is a 'way of communicating choices and strategies that all writing, deconstructivist and poststructuralist, must make' (Hansen 2006: xix). *Critical Security Methods* similarly engages in taking back method and methodology for critical security analyses. However, it reformulates the rather rationalist approach to methodology that informs most other books on methodology, even those written from a critical perspective. 'Rationalist' refers here not to rational choice social science but rather to the conception of methods as a rational choice that aligns a technical instrument of analysis to a theory for the application of a coherent set of procedures and techniques. We depart from this in three ways.

First, we move away from the 'cascading path' approach that starts with theory and moves down to methodology and then to methods. In this widespread and generally unquestioned approach, theory is the starting point where the epistemological, ontological and normative questions and perspectives are established. The stakes for critical research remain thus at the theoretical level. Subsequently, these authors discuss methodology as the set of ideas that informs, justifies and validates the aims and methods of research. And finally, they introduce methods as the tools that critical security researchers can use to conduct their inquiry on the empirical world.

The problem with the cascading approach to theory, methodology and methods is that it addresses the meaning, purpose and practice of scholarship *in advance* of the scholar's use of methods in their encounter with the empirical world, separating the two. True, theoretical concerns about epistemology, ontology, and normativity *inform* the methods and the aims of research. And critical theoretical concerns will almost certainly influence the interpretations, conclusions and even self-reflections drawn from the research. This awareness has often moved methodology 'up' to meta-theoretical debates, while still relegating methods to the bottom of the hierarchy (Jackson 2011; Wight 2006). However, in existing works on methodology in CSS, theory and method are kept apart in a hierarchy linked by methodology. To question this hierarchy, we aim to reconnect method and methodology in ways

that render methods significant in the research process. We do so by reconceptualizing method as *practice*.

Second, we move beyond the assumption of coherence that frames this cascading approach to methodology and method. Here, methods and methodology are about rational choices and selection of appropriate tools that are coherent with a particular theory and epistemology. The structure of Shepherd's textbook epitomizes this approach: theoretical chapters are presented first, in order to inform choices about methods that follow as forms of data collection. Only then is the student properly equipped, 'with knowledge of the theoretical foundations and techniques necessary for the conduct of independent critical research in the field of security studies' (Shepherd 2013: 1). Instead, our book approaches methods as experimentation through the concept of methodological *bricolage*.

Third, we extend the critical sensibility of security analysis in CSS to methods as well. To do so, we expand the question of reflexivity to include an analysis of the effects that methods as practices have. In the third section below, we discuss the relevance of criticality for our approach and the politics of method.

This introduction addresses each of these three moves in turn, and then discusses the frameworks for security analysis that emerge out of a critical engagement with method and methodology.

## Method as practice: The security life of methods

The first move we make away from the approach to treat methods as a bridge between a theory and a technical instrument of analysis is to reconceptualize method as *practice*. Rather than treating security as a given object or value, critical security studies has understood security as a practice through which the 'security-ness' of situations is created. For something to become a security concern, institutional, political, technological, and various other work is performed that makes it a matter of insecurity. This process can take many forms. It can take the form of a speech act in which security is called into existence by speaking it, just like a promise. It can also take the form of professionals of security enacting security routines in areas of social and political life. Social movements can mobilize needs for security in relation to vulnerabilities created by dominant powers as a political tactic. Thus, critical security research is about understanding security as practice in the broadest sense. As well as the literal sense of practice as 'what people do', this includes discourses, ideas, power relationships, bodies of knowledge, techniques of government, technologies, and the linkages between them.

Method, we argue, can be understood as practice in this broad sense of 'doing'. Method can also be understood in the more specific definition of practice as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki 2001: 2). For example, in the European Union the scope of identification with Europe is measured in regular surveys of public knowledge, sentiments and opinions about the European Union. A methodological practice – a survey – enacts 'identity' as a sum of individual feelings

towards the EU and knowledge about it. Although a shared and instituted practice, it is not the only method through which European identity is enacted and evaluated. Identity is also enacted in the circulation of institutional discourses about Europe, for example. The methodological practice of identification then draws on rhetorical devices and use of discursive registers rather than surveys of public opinion. European identity is further enacted in deploying European repertoires of action in disputes such as European rights frameworks and institutional mechanisms. Instead of surveys or discourse analysis, identity is then constituted and evaluated through sociological registering of repertoires of action and their use.

In this understanding, methods entail a particular embodied 'practical sense' or *habitus* developed in a professional field. In recent discussions of method in CSS, methodology often also works as a form of 'hygiene' (Law 2004). Methodology comes to affirm 'the moralist idea that if only you do your methods properly you will lead a healthy research life' (Law 2004: 9). For example, in the words of Salter, the aim is for 'good, clean...clear research design' (Salter and Mutlu 2012: 15). There are understandable reasons for the hygienic approach. Students and researchers need ways to justify their methods to others. They are called on to affirm the rigour, credibility, seriousness and scientificity of their work. This is all the more difficult when they are trying to make practical use of a fairly new and challenging body of theory that is relatively unfamiliar and potentially disruptive to others. As a heterodox approach, they often need to negotiate their access in terms of orthodox expectations institutionalized in grant awarding bodies, supervision committees, obligatory methods classes, and peer reviewers from other methodological persuasions. Focus on and demands for clear methods have a gate-keeping function in these negotiations. In the scholarly field of security studies and IR the 'hygiene' of method is a *habitus*. It is therefore not surprising that expanding the legitimacy of critical security approaches in this scholarly field at some stage runs into the need to demonstrate methodological credentials. Although method issues have been raised from time to time, in the last couple of years the methodological question has gained a distinct momentum for both developing CSS and increasing its legitimacy within the research field. However, demanding a focus on methods is a powerful tool to neutralize the more disruptive aspects of heterodox approaches – to make them more like the existing orthodox knowledge and its ways of doing research. Therefore, the methodological stake for CSS is to import its heterodox elements into its practice of method, thus messing up the hygienizing effects by doing methods differently. An important first step is to conceptualize methods as practice rather than simply a technique that consists in applying a proper and internally coherent way of doing surveys, discourse analysis, regression analysis, and so on.

Recasting methods as practice draws attention to the fact that methods are not limited to the academic field of security studies. Methods circulate through other social spaces, can be formulated in different fields, acquire legitimacy elsewhere, or travel from the academic field to other social fields and vice versa. Transferring the analysis of security as practice to methodological thought displaces methods from a

tool of representing reality to a securitizing practice. In other words, methods are not simply tools of analysis but are developed and deployed as part of security practices themselves: e.g., analysis, precaution, horizon scanning, mapping, visual representation, all make possible the multiplicity and dispersion of security practices. Social network analysis is an oft-cited example, used by security experts for the purposes of risk profiling as well as by social scientists. According to Marieke de Goede, security experts in the ‘war on terror’ redeploy methods of social network analysis that have been developed by critical social scientists (De Goede 2012). To paraphrase Law, Ruppert and Savage, methods are in and of security worlds (Law, Ruppert, and Savage 2011). We refer to these processes of circulation of practice as the ‘security life of methods’. Our coinage is inspired by the language of ‘*social life of methods*’ developed in sociology to ‘focus on the affordances and capacities which are mobilized in and through methods themselves’ (Savage 2013: 4; Ruppert, Law, and Savage 2013).

Our insight is that security practices themselves entail methods. For example, to return to social network analysis, security agencies have adopted and developed methods to *map* relationships between individuals they deem suspicious. So what does it mean to use mapping as a critical methodology (Chapter 2)? How can we research materiality when objects have been propelled to the heart of counterterrorism: critical infrastructures, ‘dirty bombs’ or ‘dangerous liquids’ (Chapter 3)? Similarly, in the UK, the Ministry of Defence has built an image database and made it available to the public. What does it mean to use visual methods in research when visual methods are widespread in the world of security experts (Chapter 4)? If methods are practices through which security agencies intervene in social life, then what do they mean for our own research?

The security life of methods means that the security practices we study in CSS are often methods themselves. These methods are found in the situated rationalities and knowledge systems that CSS researchers have always aimed to study. For example, when we study how visibility relates to security, we are not simply adding new ‘visual’ research objects to our security research programmes, but trying to understand the security implications of visualizing practices and representational methods. Data visualizations, for example, are important methods in social network analysis, which are used by security agencies to make sense of large quantities of communication data. Similarly, to study cartography and forms of mapping through CSS is not simply to study maps as artefacts, but to study mapping *practices*. To map is to practise a method. Furthermore, this practice is not only something that happens ‘out there’, on which we can turn our critical gaze. As our chapter on mapping shows, mapping is also a *method* to be practised in CSS. So if we want to understand the implications of mapping as a practice, then it makes little analytical sense to make a strong distinction between academic methods removed from the world and non-academic methods in the world. There is neither a real methodological distinction nor a practical one, since there is extensive circulation between the practitioners and methodologies of ‘academic’ methods and those of ‘security’ methods. If we are to study methods as practices, what is important is not

the type of actor, their objects of concern or even their political aims, but the workings, effects and implications of the practices themselves.

Scholarly *habitus* and the circulation of methods emphasize the role of regularity, reproduction and continuity in the concept of practice. Methods are often taught as a set of procedures and operations that need to be followed. Moreover, method training is part of creating particular research *habitus* such as quantitative training that reproduces a positivist enactment of knowledge and qualitative discourse analysis that instils a post-positivist research disposition. Methods also reproduce particular arrangements of political practice. For example, political geographical mapping techniques reproduce a flat world of states or geopolitical renditions of *Lebensraum* – and not a world of exchange relations between mobile people.

Yet practices are also about change. It is the problem of change that captures the critical sensibility of CSS. Critical security studies is not about identifying and analysing security *problems*, but rather security *problematizations* as the ways in which things come to be treated as security problems. It does not seek to *solve* security problems, but to understand how they came to be constituted as problems in the first place. Indeed, going back to the Frankfurt School and the early days of critical international relations, critical theory has always been a critique of ‘problem-solving theory’ (see also [Chapter 8](#) in this volume). We return to the problem of change, criticality of method and politics later in this introductory chapter.

For the moment, suffice to say that our aim is not to solve the problem of methods in CSS. It seems that once the question of methodology is resolved and validated, the critical scholar can go out to conduct their research into security practices. Methods then become solutions to research problems, a form of ‘problem-solving theory’. We argue that the concern of CSS with practices and problematizations should be extended to the practice and problematization of method itself. We ask not only what it means to treat *security as practice* but also what it means to treat *method as practice*.

This means not *solving* the problem of method through methodological elaboration at the ‘meta’ level or by defining methods and templates of research design suitable for CSS in advance of conducting research, but by deepening the *problematization* of method throughout the practice of research. Method should be questioned as practice; as *part of* the empirical world of practices that we already study in CSS. This means continuing to ask what method *does* as a practice. For example, how does the practice of method affect actors in the world? How does method *constitute* worlds by constructing them as intelligible? How does the practice of method affect its practitioners? How does the practice of method *constitute* us as researchers, when we think about methods, learn methods, discuss methods, and most importantly, use methods?

Our conception of methods emerges from this trend of letting research be driven more intensely and directly by what actors in security and politics actually do, the ways that they do it, and the effects of their actions. But as mostly happens when positioning or naming something new, this idea that security studies is turning from philosophy to practice *tout court* is exaggerated. Our questions are

about the different ways that ideas, theory, methods and empirical objects are assembled in the course of the problematization of security and insecurity. Critical methods then start from the forms that insecurities take, and from the question of how insecurities are constituted as objects of knowledge and action. For instance, methods for analysing the role of dangerous objects are entwined with the production of an array of objects of insecurity: from bombs to drones and liquids (Chapter 3). They are also connected to visual techniques producing iconic images of insecurity objects that are diffused in society via news media, advertising, movies, and so on (Chapter 4). Understanding method as practice has the effect of making methodological assemblages visible in concrete sites of (in)security.

### Method as experimentation: *Bricolage*

If methods are understood as practices, we can adopt a more relaxed attitude towards methodological experimentation and *bricolage*. By treating methodology experimentally, we reject the role of methodology as a bridge between theory and method that provides justification for the use of particular methods. In social science, methodology and method are often differentiated in similar terms to theory and practice, with ‘methodology’ being meta-theoretical reflection (Ackerly, Stern, and True 2006; Jackson 2011) and ‘method’ standing for the more lowly work of putting theory into practice, of selecting the appropriate tools. However, we suggest that the two are more closely entangled than is generally understood. The analytical move, then, should not always be top-down (from theory to methodology to method, or from abstract to concrete) but often a more experimental move of to and fro, of improvisation and *bricolage*. In this sense, we turn methodology into a way of experimenting with an assemblage of concepts, methods and empirical objects. ‘Assemblage’ refers to a mode of bringing together that allows for heterogeneity – spatial, logical, temporal, ideational – within apparently ordered social realms (Marcus and Saka 2006: 2). It works on the basis that possibilities for disruption, innovation and creative change take place in experimentation, by relating what is usually kept apart. Assemblage also refers to rhizomic knowledge practice, which emphasizes momentary interference in various sites, trying things out for a while, moving on to other sites, inflecting other combinations and which contrasts with understanding knowledge practice as growing a solid tree from ontological and epistemological roots. Assembling is a messy way of knowing that contrasts sharply with the architectural idea of building a coherent and stable knowledge mansion.

Our view of *bricolage* is thus different from simply combining different methods in some kind of new multi-method approach more adequate to the complexity of the world. Multi-method approaches combine different methods for the purpose of gathering more data that can be added up for a better understanding of the issue as a whole. *Bricolage*, on the other hand, takes complexity not as a challenge to knowledge that needs to be overcome by multiplying methods but as the recognition that the world consist of things that ‘relate but don’t add up’ (Mol and Law 2002: 1). While



multi-method approaches emphasize multiplying data about a phenomenon, *bricolage* focuses on experimenting with combining theories, concepts, methods, and data in unfamiliar ways to bring out relations that otherwise remain largely invisible. However, *bricolage* remains a situated interference rather than the formulation of a piece of knowledge that aims at completing the jigsaw of universal knowledge about the world. In our understanding, methods are thus active and particular rather than passive and universally applicable (Kincheloe 2005).

In IR, Hayward Alker's (1996) critique of the relatively rigid differentiation in research on international relations between epistemological and ontological choices on the one hand and methodological ones on the other, provided an important starting point for our approach to method. For Alker, methods are an integral part of the analytical, normative and political constitution of knowledge. Methods are not detached from meta-theoretical, theoretical and analytical concerns, but neither are they necessarily fixed to certain theoretical positions. The connections between the various components of knowledge formation are what matters, constituting an experimental site of knowledge production where methods are developed, combined, applied, or modified. There is no need to deal with the detail of Alker's methodological work here but his argument for a more relaxed stance towards methodological experimentation and *bricolage* informs our own critique (Alker 1996).

The critique, in fact, can be raised against much of the research in social science and in methods training courses, where methods 'appear to be free-floating tools unmoored in conceptual space' (Yanow 2006: 8). Methods are generally taken to be of a limited number and transferable from one field to another and, to a certain extent, from one theory to another. A recent book on qualitative methods lists the following set of methods: in-depth interview, oral history, focus group interview, ethnography, content analysis, case study, and mixed methods (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). Nonetheless, the authors also set limits to this transferability inasmuch as some methods are seen to be more in line with certain approaches. For example, critical approaches to security have so far tended to emphasize qualitative forms of discourse analysis as particularly suited for engaging with the social construction of security (Hansen 2006; Campbell 1992; Weldes 1999; Fierke 2007; Milliken 1999). Quantitative methods, on the other hand, have often been associated with rational choice approaches (e.g., King 1989; King and Zeng 2001; Goldstein 1992).

These separations are not always strict or discrete, however. Methodological pluralism, triangulation, mixing methods and using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same research are quite common (see e.g., Della Porta and Keating 2008). Yet, although not completely dismissing the meaning or usefulness of these distinctions, our approach does not follow them, and does more than bring them together or mix them. Ann Tickner (2006: 20) has also noted the multiplicity of methods that feminists have mobilized in their research, from statistical research to ethnography and discourse analysis. However, Tickner places the feminist sensibility at the level of methodology rather than methods themselves, challenging 'the often unseen androcentric or masculine biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all the disciplines' (2006: 36). Being open towards

combining various methods that some deem incompatible does not, however, imply a reduction of methods to theory-neutral tools.

Understanding methodology as experimental, as *bricolage*, as we are suggesting, means rethinking the notion of experiment along the lines offered by science and technology studies (STS). Rather than being associated with hypothesis testing, experiments create novelty, produce phenomena and make something invisible visible (Latour 1999; Shapin 1988; Shapin and Schaffer 1985). Experimentation is also associated with innovative art and other creative work, thus challenging boundaries between scientific and artistic life. Interestingly, in the nineteenth century, experiments in art and science were seen as similar (Basu and Macdonald 2007). Understanding methodology as experimentation entails a rethinking of critical security research. Rather than adjusting methods to critical theoretical commitments, critical research becomes a *bricolage*, experimentally bringing together concepts, questions, and controversies distinct to empirical sites. The purpose of critical research is not grand theorizing or devising an overarching theory of security, but creating innovative and distinct assemblages by experimenting with methods, concepts, and empirics. Experiments challenge that which is taken for granted and attend to the complexity of the world.

The emphasis on practice and experimentation does not disconnect methods from meta-theoretical, theoretical, analytical and case-selection choices. Instead, it draws attention, through experimenting and analytical assemblage, to the ways in which methods and methodology are interrelated. The principle of experimentation draws attention away from the distinction itself by treating method and methodology as practices of experimenting, connecting and assembling.

Conducting research on or in an archive, field, or institutional practice, as the chapters here demonstrate, raises the question of how to assemble concepts, empirical data, and epistemological and ontological perspectives into an analytical story. Here, method does not refer to a tool that will bridge theory and empirical processes – representation and reality – sustaining the credibility, scientificity, objectivity, and seriousness of knowledge. Instead it questions how to problematize security practices and processes, how to interfere and intervene in security knowledge by analysing the processes and conditions through which insecurities are made politically significant. An experimental research approach means that creativity is manifest through method work as well. Methods can be assembled in new ways beyond existing distinctions. Thus, an experimental approach can question the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods. Pierre Bourdieu's work has shown that quantitative and qualitative methods can be productively assembled with concepts and empirical sites (Bigo 2011; [Chapter 2](#) in this volume). Experiments can also productively assemble authorship collectives through collaborative practice ([Chapter 8](#) on the method of collaboration).

While an experimental approach relaxes the strictures of traditional approaches to method, it does not mean that it loses any coherence or that it offers an 'anything goes' view of methodology. Just as an assemblage holds together while remaining heterogeneous (Allen 2011), *bricolage* presupposes the staging of an analytical story.

It also works within fields of practice, where the scientific *habitus* creates constraints, while being itself amenable to change. Methods of research have gained and lost legitimacy over time. Yet, our understanding has implications for methods of teaching and training. Although teaching particular techniques – such as content analysis, regression analysis, focus groups, life story techniques, and so on – is important, it needs to be embedded in training practices of experimenting with the assembling of concepts, theories, data, and methods to bring out relations that otherwise remain largely invisible. To realize such training, critical security methods teaching needs to be organized in terms of ‘methodological problematizations’ of insecurity rather than a list of methods. Arranging methods training in this way would embed methodological techniques in a wider set of practices, including the practice of methods in security fields. The notion of problematization also instils an understanding that knowledge does not arise from applying a method correctly but is a practice of assembling concepts, theories, methods, and data. This book proposes a selection of six methodological assemblages, each organized around problematizations that are pertinent in contemporary security and scholarly practice and through which the teaching of critical security methods could be organized.

### **Method as critical: The political life of methods**

Our third methodological intervention is to develop the CSS critical sensibility in the direction of the politics of method. Understanding method as practice and as experimentation is the first step in this critical engagement. As the previous two sections have shown, treating method critically means questioning and problematizing method in the course of research. It means challenging any rigid separation between different methods, the different users of methods, and the different uses of methods.

The ‘security life of methods’ draws attention to how security methods help to bring forth worlds of (in)security. They help to fix the limits of what is to be considered secure and what are socially acceptable norms, conduct, knowledge, research and political practice in these worlds. In turn, security methods also help to fix what is considered insecure, abnormal, dangerous and to be excluded. Security methods help to constitute securitized subjects such as ‘the terrorist’ or ‘vulnerable humans’ and securitized objects such as ‘dangerous liquids’ or viruses against which security practices can be/are mobilized. On the back of the move from security as research object to security as practice, CSS has shown that security knowledge is not simply knowledge about worlds but also always a particular re-iteration of these worlds. The production of knowledge is therefore never normatively and politically neutral. In the late 1970s Ken Booth (1979), for example, unpacked in great detail how strategic studies were inherently conservative. The analysis of insecurity implied a preference for re-instating status quo. Similarly, but from a different theoretical angle, Bradley Klein (1994) has shown how strategic studies reproduced certain political and analytical discursive schemas as truths hiding the inherently unstable nature of knowledge claims.

Translating these debates to the problem of method implies that methods are not just about useful knowledge (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009), they are also about the reproduction of particular *habitus* and social fields. This helps explain why CSS has shied away from using statistical methods for analysing discourse. In so far as quantitative methods in IR were a device that strengthened positivist knowledge positions and produced a disposition towards the production of order rather than disruption, it made sense for CSS to focus on non-quantitative methods. There is nothing inherent in statistical techniques that prevents them from being used in critical knowledge – with its focus on disruptive practices and the politicality of knowledge itself – but there are field effects. The way such techniques operated and were positioned in the academic field of international relations in the 1980s and 1990s made it challenging to draw on quantitative methods for the purpose of critical knowledge.

Critical methodology thus does not simply unpack the methods at work in securitizing processes, but includes an analytics of the controversies and problematizations in which these methods are ‘enacted’ and contested. Methods do not come from nowhere. What are the political dynamics, strategic imperatives and institutional facilitators that allow methods to be mobilized around security problematizations? Is there a political decision, a marketplace for methods and technologies, or an ineluctable technologization that potentially builds security into everyday life, our architectures, social networks, and tools of work? Methods are therefore essentially situated in political life, both in the security field and in the academic field. Their circulation and institutionalization take place in fields of contestation and domination. Methods are a practice of and within power relations; they exercise power and are inscribed by power relations. For example, statistical methods have been a practice of statecraft through creating populations as a category upon which states could act. Ethnographic methods are inscribed with and partake in shaping a history of colonization and war. Similarly, methods have been used to contest policies, such as research that finds statistically significant relations between health and economic inequality, which has been used to challenge neoliberal economic policies. Critical security methods raise questions about the power relations that are simultaneously shaped by and shape methodological practice.

We cannot simply take methods as we find them. We need to understand their descent, their formation, and the perceived needs to which they respond. For example, how and why were forms of profiling supplemented by social network analysis as a security method? Understanding particular objects of (in)security is entwined with understanding the emergence of particular methods that enact social worlds. For instance, the research on human trafficking has been framed by the methodological question of categorization and quantification (see e.g., Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005). Gathering data has, however, been imagined as an objective way of grasping human trafficking at the expense of questions of how ‘sexual exploitation’ or ‘slavery’ need to be conceptualized for its analysis. This needs to be understood within the market of NGO expertise as well as academic expertise relevant for NGOs and international organizations.

This sensitivity to the political life of methods is not limited to the field of security practice. It also extends to the methodological production of knowledge in the field of scholarship. The conditions of the production, circulation and dominance of methods in the academic field raise questions about the power relations at play, struggles over what counts as relevant and what is sufficiently important to be studied, as well as questions about what research topics may be left aside because methods are deemed inadequate or inadaptable for its study.

One example of this political life of methods in the academic field is the 'disciplining' effect of academic disciplines. Critical scholars know well the debate in IR about 'science' and the demand placed by neopositivist gatekeepers on new approaches to forward their claims in the form of testable hypotheses (Jackson 2011).<sup>1</sup> But we also need to consider the political effects of the genealogy of security studies itself as a subdiscipline of IR. This genealogy has path-dependent effects on what we are expected to study, where we are expected to locate those studies, and where we are to publish (see [Chapters 6 and 7](#) for discussions of these limitations). International relations remains one of the advanced forums for the discussion of security, but many of its journals police the boundaries of what they consider to be 'international' and what they do not. Given that many of the early scholars of CSS have now risen to positions of power, this raises the question of disciplinary path breakers becoming positioned in the field of security studies. Are there inevitable disciplinary practices that come with taking a position in this field and negotiating the place of critical knowledge and methods within it? Whatever the 'disciplining' power of disciplines, we consider that, empirically, security practices have long since sprung the territorial and disciplinary trap of the 'international' (Shah 2012). This is evidenced when militaries turn to anthropologists for help, when security services turn to sociologists to understand problematized social phenomena, and when the market for security technologies is global. Critical security studies has played a considerable role, though not exclusively of course, in reconstructing the security studies field so as to include multiple security practices and to limit the hold that national security approaches and a territorialized conception of the international have on security studies. The chapters in this book work on the back of these developments. They examine methodological issues in and for security studies that in important ways has moved beyond the international to security practices operating in a great diversity of scales and sites. Among the issues looked at are kettling in the UK, resistance in Colombia, international negotiations of environmental issues, the global war on terror, biometric identification in India and urban crime.

Placing disciplinary *habitus*, power relations and regimes of knowledge at the heart of contemporary demands for a stronger focus on methods in critical security studies is central to what we call the 'political life of methods'. Critical methods require reflexivity and self-interrogation about these elements.<sup>2</sup> The chapters in this book share a strongly reflexive disposition towards the disciplinary effects of security studies. For example, [Chapter 6](#) discusses the consequences and limits of using security as an analytical lens in two different research projects. [Chapter 8](#) raises

questions about the limits of individualized reward systems in research. [Chapter 3](#) explores the interstices of materiality and discourse as a way of moving beyond the stark and disciplining opposition that is currently used within critical approaches. In doing so, it challenges the linguistic turn that took up a particular understanding of language as performative and constituting reality, which has informed a considerable part of critical security approaches in the past three decades.

This reflexive disposition transfigures into a political act when it supports researchers in seeking to produce knowledge that works away from and disrupts not only given truths but more specifically the methodological regimes that define what makes truthful knowledge. Our earlier endorsement of methodological experimentation disrupts disciplinary methodological regimes by pushing the limits of strong methodological coherence between meta-theory, theory, methods and data. Similarly, in an attempt to challenge the emphasis on methods as technique and research design, we have organized the chapters in terms of frameworks of methodological practices that have become central to both securitizing practices and their scholarly analysis, such as visibility, ethnographic proximity, and the materiality of security objects.

The ‘political life of methods’ draws attention to the role that methods can play in challenging and changing dominant productions of (in)security. Methods do not just carry substantive assumptions about the world; they also have effects for social and political life. This demands that critical security methods consider not only the ‘situated-ness’ and limits of knowledge and the contestations surrounding methods, but also include a sensitivity to potentially subjugated, silenced or marginalized practices and knowledges. Unease with scientificity and the dominance it entails upon other forms of knowledge has often surfaced in critical approaches. For example, feminist scholars have rightly pointed out that scientific knowledge entails its own forms of masculine domination (Tickner 2006; Sylvester 1994). They have led a call for a methodological privileging of subordinated positions, in which knowledge about the world can be formulated from the position of those who are politically as well as epistemologically marginalized. As such, feminism has been most outspoken about developing knowledge that is grounded in the lifeworld of women who are often absent from security knowledge (Enloe 2007; Haraway 1988). Poststructuralist approaches similarly experimented with methods of intertextuality and the breaking down of disciplinary distinctions between genres of text and knowledge to demonstrate how worlds are not simply created by political and security systems and elites but are also brought into being in mundane practices that are often seen as insignificant in the security studies field, such as sports, travel writing, diaries, popular TV series and so on (see e.g., Lisle 2013; Rowley and Weldes 2012; Kiersey and Neumann 2013; Derian and Shapiro 1989). Their methods also made visible how instituted scholarly methods tend to reproduce dominant power relations and the legitimating frameworks that sustain them. Disrupting the latter by introducing genre-crossing methods aimed at creating the possibility for subjugated knowledge and practice to gain presence in the scholarly field of security knowledge.

The political life of methods thus refers to reflexivity about the power relations and *habitus* that methods produce and sustain. This means proactively positioning oneself through the development of methods so as to challenge familiar and instituted processes of validation of what matters for security practice and studies. A key question for critical scholars, in spite of their IR/security studies heritage, is what it means to start not here in ‘the international’ but elsewhere. Feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial approaches share this mobilizing of a distinct positioning, as does the use of popular culture and the recent experimenting with auto-ethnographic methods to understand international politics. For critical security scholars this can mean starting with situated practices of struggle rather than security (see [Chapter 6](#)). For example, developing critical mapping methods when analysing geopolitical security practice or the reification of territoriality through border control regimes often work by making visible the victims and injustices produced by security practices ([Chapter 2](#)). Or, it can require that critical security scholars undo security as an object and experiment with methods that analyse security practices as more dispersed and possibly not primarily intelligible as ‘security’ (see [Chapter 6](#)). Another way of taking a critical position through method is to experiment with collaboration in order to challenge the limits of individualizing forms of knowledge production in scholarly fields organized through new management practices ([Chapter 8](#)).

Critical security methods are thus also political because of their rupturing effects (see Aradau and Huysmans 2013). This may not mean ‘changing the world’ in the way that Marx (1994) called on philosophers to do (although it might); more often, critical methods mean changing worlds in local and immediate terms. When we practise methods, we talk to selected people, we go to distinct places, we interact, we are hired, we employ assistants, we buy, we consume, we introduce ideas, we collaborate, we argue, we produce and we publish. As security researchers, we interact with those affected by security practices and those responsible for security practices, and we interact with other researchers, creating new forms of knowledge and new social arrangements. In so doing, these practices can introduce turbulence into existing routines, *habitus* and practices. Sometimes they might resolve issues and questions, but they might also make them messier. Sometimes they also create entirely new issues and questions.

In making the political life of methods central to critical methodology, we must thus add two elements to our understanding of method as practice and method as experimentation. First, we draw attention to methods, including critical security methods, as being practices that bear upon and are enmeshed in power relations and struggles over strategic imperatives and institutional facilitators of particular security and scholarly practices. Methods do not only live in social but also in political dynamics about what counts as relevant, valuable and right. The aim of incorporating methods of reflecting on these politics within critical security methods is not to declare and transcend ‘biases’ but to recognize the political responsibilities and effects of methodological practice. Second, critical security methods can also be understood as taking position in these dynamics in favour of

rupturing not simply existing truths but habitual and institutionalized uses of methods that reproduce dominant political practices. This latter understanding of the politicality of methods is important for linking the methods discussion to the broader critical project that comes with a concern for challenging limits, transgressing boundaries and privileging the agency of the marginalized.

## Methods as frameworks of critical security analysis

Before giving an overview of the chapters in the book, let's go over the main elements that make methods frameworks of critical security analysis. The aim of this book is to translate the central characteristics of critical security studies into critical security methods. It is a reply to calls for developing methods and methodological frameworks in critical security studies – and critical IR more generally – by proposing a performative and experimental approach to methods. Our approach partly emerges from observing parallel developments in methods of security practice and methodological interests in critical security studies. For example, there is a growing interest in ethnography and anthropology in both critical security studies and security operations. The intensified calls for visual methods in critical security studies go hand in hand with developments in visual securitization, both in the current old and new media practices and the security institutions. The outspoken use of network analysis in security practices runs parallel with methodological interest in network analysis in critical security studies. A research interest in new materialist methods is gaining momentum while forensic methods are taking a more outspoken front seat in security practices. At issue here is not that these parallel developments in the scholarly field of critical security studies and the field of security practice are directly and causally related or that they are inherently problematic. Rather, observing these parallel developments draws attention to the performative rather than representative nature of methods, and thus to the need to include what we call 'the security life of methods' in methodological frameworks. It translates the performative understanding of security as a securitizing practice – rather than as a given object or value – into the conception of methods as practice that we propose. Methods are not simply instruments of representation that extract data according to fixed procedures so as to bridge a gap between knowledge and reality; they act in and upon security worlds. 'Critical security methods' imply a performative understanding of methods as practice.

Our approach recognizes the uneasy relation between methods and critical approaches, not in the sense that the latter do not 'do' methods, but rather in the sense that a focus on methods often erases the inherently social, normative and political content of social scientific knowledge. Making the political life of methods a central component of frameworks of security analysis allows critical approaches to engage with method-focused developments in ways that sustain a reflexive disposition. Such a disposition makes it imperative to include in the practising of methods an understanding of how methods are inscribed by and bear upon power



relations, struggles and habitual dispositions in the fields of both security and scholarship. Rather than being erased from methodological debate, the normative and political work that methods do then becomes a key issue in these debates. One of the key interferences made by critical security studies in the study of security has been to draw attention to how security practices sustain and create exclusions and dominations. Conceptualizing methods as having not only a security but also a political life translates this interference into the development of methods.

This understanding of methods has consequences for how we conduct methods development, training and debate. Methods are not simply a technical matter of proper research design and teaching a set of procedures of data extraction. Methods teaching and discussion requires the training of modes of data extraction to be mixed with sociologies of their history, presence and struggles in contemporary security practice and fields of knowledge production. The question is never simply 'how to apply a particular method properly' but always also 'what do methods do in and to the security and security studies fields where they are practised'. At stake in methods debates is thus never only the production of scientificity or useful knowledge through proper use of methods, but also the production of political knowledge – knowledge that reiterates, questions or disrupts existing power relations.

In this book we have added to this approach an argument for a more experimental understanding of methods. 'Experimental' does not mean setting up controlled labs where one can do quasi-clinical experiments on objects and subjects. Rather, experimental refers to a more freely combinatory approach to methods. Research methods are a matter of assembling various concepts, methodological techniques and data without being shoehorned into prescribed requirements of coherent alignments of methods, meta-theory, theory and research problem. Instead it values *bricolage* and trial and error. In doing so, it prioritizes the creative use of methods, concepts and data to deliver new insights above rigour, coherence and the sufficiency of data. The purpose is to make methods a site of highly creative and experimental knowledge construction rather than an almost technological site defined by the proper application of prescribed sets of analytical techniques.

Given this approach to methods, the chapters in this book and the wider project of critical security methods are not organized around lists of particular methods of research. Instead, the chapters deploy the analytical framework advanced here to develop critical methods in six different methodological assemblages: mapping, visuality, materiality and discourse, proximity and distance, genealogy, and collaboration. The chapters offer different methodological experimentations that combine a set of concepts, orientations, empirical sites and modes of organizing methodological practice that carry the critical sensibilities of critical security studies into methodological discussion. Taking methodological questions as key drivers in this assembling means formulating frameworks of analysis with specific attention to connecting critical theory and empirical sites of security problems. Yet, forging such connections is not a technical issue of the most effective and efficient way of extracting data to link the worlds of empirics to the worlds of theory. New frameworks emerge from critical methodological assembling that traverses distinctions

between theoretical development, methodological practice in security and scholarly fields, and concrete problems of insecurity, vulnerability, conflict and risk. These methodological experimentations thus respond to scholarly calls for methods and a recognition that methods play a key role in shaping processes of securitizing.

The chapters in this book were developed through a collaborative work of several years, and they are not always univocal but often evince tensions and different takes on the analytical frameworks or methodological experimentations. They also pay heed to the difficulties that researchers encounter in developing methodological analyses in critical security studies, and in particular, the challenges experienced in connecting theoretical development and empirical practices.

**Chapter 2** on ‘Mapping’ explores distinct critical methodological mapping tools and vocabularies for studying the spatiality of security practices. In the ‘practice turn’ in social science, we find a surge in spatial language and metaphors, for example, topography, topology, geography, boundaries, mapping and maps, networks, fields, and lines of sight. The study of mapping forces us to re-think the spatialities of security, which in turn translates into an emerging interest in the methodology of mapping. The chapter discusses the security and political life of maps by contextualizing the renewed fascination with mapping that has developed over the last decade in security studies and among security practitioners. It articulates the politics inherent in the map as artefact and in mapping as a practice, arguing that maps are not simply mirrors of reality, but rather ‘mobile engines’ that distort and co-constitute the outside world, assembling it and rendering it mobile. With all this in mind, the chapter explores in detail what mapping means as a critical security method and security practice by investigating ‘mapping’ in the work of two different and increasingly important authors: Bruno Latour and Pierre Bourdieu.

**Chapter 3** on ‘Discourse and Materiality’ starts from the proliferation of dangerous objects in security discourses – from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to the more mundane liquids at airports, and from viruses to luggage – to explore methods of analysis that do not reproduce the separation of discourse and materiality or their hierarchy. To this purpose, the chapter proposes to start with relationality in analysing discourses and materialities of security. While relationality is often referred to in international relations and social sciences more generally, the chapter operationalizes relationality in three ways: through *dispositifs*, performativity and agency, in order to experiment with different conceptual–empirical assemblages. Drawing on concepts inspired by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Karen Barad, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett, the chapter deploys them in a series of empirical sites in order to devise a framework for critical analysis of discourses and materialities of (in)security. From the deployment of biometric technology, the performativity of drug classifications, to critical infrastructure protection, the chapter recasts the relation between discourse and materiality through methodological experimentation. Finally, the chapter unpacks the political effects of critical method assemblages it has explored.

**Chapter 4** on ‘Visuality’ develops methodological insights in analysing visuality in the form of still or moving images, signs, symbols, charts, and graphs, among others

that play a central role in security practice. Whereas we have come to associate visibility with various representations of security, the vast majority of works in critical approaches to security have focused on the discursive rather than the visual as their medium of analysis. Visual aspects of meaning making and discourse have properties that discourse analysis of written or spoken artefacts cannot reach. Starting from an overview of how images have been dealt with in the critical study of security so far, the chapter develops an argument for a broader methodological focus on regimes of visibility and the polysemous and ambivalent nature of visual strategies. Although visual artefacts remain important, the chapter explores in particular methodological implications of studying pictorial power constituting truth, the power of affect in visibility, and the political significance of banal visual spectacles.

Chapter 5 on 'Proximity' and Chapter 6 on 'Distance' consider the growing interest in ethnographic work and evaluate the strengths and limits of mediating proximity and distance in research and practice. These chapters start from the observation that security studies are often too far from actual practice and, as such, frequently end up understanding security practice through representations rather than through experience or engagement. The chapters foreground the importance of engaging with situated practices through fieldwork in order to understand and to situate prevailing orders of security. Doing fieldwork is a way of performing research and part of the critical process of constructing research problematics. In this vein, Chapter 5 explores the methodology of proximity by drawing particularly on pragmatist thinkers John Dewey and Bruno Latour and elaborating on participatory observation. The chapter draws on fieldwork carried out both in conflict and violent situations such as in Israel and in urban Brazil as well as in intergovernmental headquarters where problems are framed in terms of security.

These chapters also bring to our attention that fieldwork and the knowledge practices of the ethnographer can recreate or substantiate existing security orders. Chapter 6 thus explores fieldwork as a means to address the demand for distance in research, particularly as it relates to the categories through which researchers frame the object of study. The chapter mobilizes the scholarly ethics of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault to reflect upon the authors' ethnographic fieldwork into the securitization of the environment in intergovernmental processes of climate change knowledge production and peasant and worker struggles against dispossession and armed repression in Colombia. The chapter argues that mediating proximity and distance is a defining issue of critical research.

Chapter 7 on 'Genealogy' asks what it means to research 'security' through historical raw material. The chapter explores genealogy as a method of analysing past and present security problematizations, their conditions of emergence, the strategic needs they respond to, the political and epistemological struggles they involve, and the reorganizations of power relations they entail. It offers a framework for analysing the historical emergence of security problematizations and the heterogeneous assemblages of techniques, knowledges, subjectivities and objects that get constituted around them. Mirroring the way that security practices link disparate things, the chapter presents genealogy as a way to conceptualize, interfere

with and further problematize those linkages. The chapter situates genealogy in the work of Michel Foucault and explains its relationship with other Foucauldian methodological concepts such as archaeology, problematization and *dispositif*. It also contextualizes genealogy in critical international relations theory, and explains what a genealogical approach means for security studies.

Chapter 8 on ‘Collaboration’ explores collaboration as a critical method of knowledge production for security studies. In opposition to the romantic model of the individual researcher, collaboration as method opens different possibilities for knowledge creation in CSS and IR. This does not necessarily imply that collaboration is a critical method by definition, as funders and academic institutions, for instance, expect collaboration. Collaboration as a critical method depends on a series of ‘felicity conditions’ – the forms of knowledge it aims to produce (critical or problem-solving), the aims of knowledge (heuristic or entrepreneurial) and the institutional conditions of knowledge production (hierarchical or redistributive). The chapter shows how, despite its difficulties and enrolment in strategies of neoliberal academic management, collaboration can result in a transformative process for how knowledge is produced, circulated and valued.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Keohane’s definition of reflective approaches in IR and critical scholars questioning of it (Keohane 1988), (Ashley and Walker 1990), (George and Campbell 1990).
- 2 For a discussion of the importance of reflexivity for feminist methodology, see J. Ann Tickner (2006).

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