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Setting the STAGES

Setting the STAGES: introduction to the Special Issue

For now, this Special Issue is one of a kind. Each piece grows directly out of the cross-institutional network between the University of St Andrews (STA), the University of Glasgow (G), and the University of Edinburgh (E)'s Security studies (S) programmes. Together, we have created the acronym STAGES to capture these ongoing collaborations. In August 2018, we, as a small group of colleagues working at each contributing university started to discuss how our master students can learn more about security beyond the confines of their separate classrooms. As Jorge M. Lasma writes, 'In many cases, classrooms have slowly come to be seen as the only domains for learning. Other forms and channels of learning and knowledge are viewed with suspicion and sometimes even discouraged for fear of higher costs' (2013, p. 369). Challenging this idea, we set out to create a collective project to allow different students, with their own unique opinions and viewpoints on security, to meet one another to share their ideas in open, honest and lived ways.

As teachers and academics, we spend a lot of time talking about what security means and does. In certain degrees, we may even shape what students think about these issues by assigning core textbooks as essential reading (see Kirby, 2013). Along the way, students are often socialised into a pattern of listening first and speaking second. Try as we may to generate group discussion, student voices often do not get enough time, especially when they are not tied to assessments. We also never really know where, how and when students learn once they leave our classrooms or turn off their computers. Within our initial meetings, we carefully examined how we could nurture alternative ways to think and talk about security. Over the course of our brainstorming sessions, we began to realise that this network could also have many lifecycles and iterations. So, for us, the acronym STAGES felt like a perfect way to epitomise the three different universities joining together to invite students to remain eternally curious when it comes to the study of security, and to allow their understandings, reflections and ideas to evolve over time.

After months of careful planning, particularly by Dr Andrew R. Hom and Helene Frossling, on 28 June 2019, we held our first STAGES event, under the auspices of the Centre for Security Research at the University of Edinburgh. In the process, we brought together staff and master's students from three different parts of Scotland to learn and talk more about security. The entire day was packed with events ranging from dissertation panels to wellness ideas to career talks. Once again, the onus was placed on acknowledging that there are different ways of learning about and encountering security. In this respect, the STAGES event resonated with Alejandro Chávez-Segura who claims that 'Security is no longer considered only about justified violence and controlling others in military terms against enemies, but

also about having the right practices to transform our relationships, from living in fear to move forward towards cooperation and freedom' (2020). During the cross-institutional event, students also learnt new skillsets ranging from public speaking to conference presentations and academic networking. Throughout the day, they continued to connect what they had learnt in their individual programmes to group conversations about topics they had never studied before. This happened in panels, group activities and coffee breaks. Another major way for each student to expand the understanding of security was through the standing-room only keynote speech given by Professor Claudia Aradau, entitled, 'Security and ethics in the age of Artificial Intelligence'.

Unfortunately, the ongoing pandemic has prevented us from running the next planned STAGES event. If anything, COVID-19 has taught us how unpredictable, fragile and contested security can be in everyday contexts, virtual classrooms and ongoing emergency situations. At the time of writing, it is hard to capture how much this pandemic has altered what security means, how it should be taught, and indeed how we all live it each day, in myriad ways. Almost everyone can agree that global health issues will remain a paramount concern for security scholars. The problem, of course, is that public health outbreaks do not always create security. As Stephen L. Roberts and Stefan Elbe have already highlighted, pandemics can create insecurity and '*syndromic* surveillance systems' (2016, p. 47, italics in original). To be more exact, 'Policy discourses and practice within global health security now resonate with notions of "early detection", "preemption" and "response"' (ibid.). Adding another layer of complexity, Katerini Tagmatarchi Storeng and Antoine de Bengy Puyvallée have showcased the entanglements between the COVID-19 crisis and "Big Tech", smartphones and digital technologies (2021). In the face of these, and many other revelations, we need to remember that security is always constructed and spoken in many different voices.

Against this tumultuous backdrop, we are delighted to present this Special Issue, which represents the first collection of pieces produced by master students studying security at the University of St Andrews, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow in 2018–2019. Its purpose is to highlight these students' own views of security in their own words. As a result, the articles in this collection do not necessarily pursue common security studies issues. Instead, each piece opens a door to a different topic. Yet, on closer observation, the question of security remains a common theme. In terms of transparency, it is important to acknowledge that the articles that have been published are based on final projects from each author's master's programme. In order to foster inclusivity, we invited the students who produced the top two dissertations from each university to submit their pieces anonymously to CVIR. Each piece was subject to at least two rounds of rigorous, blind, peer-review from external experts. As a result, each contributor had to make extensive changes and respond to reviewer comments along the way. We are very grateful to all of them for embracing the detailed, and sometimes difficult, feedback they received on how to improve their paper. We think that this has resulted in an excellent collection of articles that showcase not only

exceptional student scholarship, but also emphasise the value of re-thinking our traditional approaches to the teaching and learning of security. Last, but in no way least, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Mrs Gillian Brunton for everything she did to make this issue possible.

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