

# 1 *A multidisciplinary dialogue on security*

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Security is omnipresent in our daily lives.\* From apparent trivialities, such as locking the front door, wearing a helmet to cycle with the kids on a bright Sunday afternoon, or remembering an increasing number of passwords, to more significant issues like dealing with domestic violence, monitoring nuclear proliferation, and limiting ethnic conflicts, security, it seems, is everywhere.

Likewise, the ubiquity of security in almost all social sciences disciplines is undisputable. Groundbreaking work by prominent criminologists has placed the concept of security at the centre of criminological scholarship for many years to come (Loader and Walker 2007; Shearing and Wood 2007; Wood and Dupont 2006; Zedner 2009). In Anthropology, security is an emerging research area that has recently gained substantial traction (Goldstein 2010, 2012; Hamilton and Placas 2011; Holbaard and Pedersen 2013). Geographers have been active in highlighting the ways in which biopolitics, territoriality and resources deeply influence security considerations and vice versa (Dalby 2009; Ingram and Dodds 2009; Le Billon 2012). Security has been one of the paramount research themes in International Relations scholarship for a long time, but only recently has this focus of this framework shifted, permitting previously marginalized perspectives to be increasingly embraced (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Buzan and Hansen 2009). In sum, scholars from all manner of social sciences are turning their attention to the study of this complex concept.

Despite this demonstrated interest in security studies within a host of academic fields, scholars rarely communicate their findings across disciplines. Students of security do not approach the study of security

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from a shared paradigm, but from a variety of theoretical and conceptual viewpoints fragmented across disciplines. In some cases, these various theoretical viewpoints are seen as competing against each other; in most cases, however, these viewpoints are simply expressed and developed in near total disciplinary isolation. Within any given discipline, work done in the other social sciences on security is at best briefly mentioned, at worse, politely ignored.

This book attempts to bridge these disciplinary canyons. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive theory of security applicable across disciplines, cases, and areas. We do not intend to offer a unique paradigm within which to conduct research on security, nor do we want to propose a unified or orthodox view of the concept. Rather, in revisiting security from an interdisciplinary perspective, the book makes two critical contributions. First, it proposes to take seriously the prospect of a multidisciplinary approach to security. Such an approach is both propitious and timely. The rise in electronic surveillance, the prominence given to immigration as a security threat in Western countries, the concern over climate change and environmental degradation, the recent international interventions (or absence of intervention), and the tension between liberty and security arising from terrorist attacks, have mobilized security scholars to analyse the role and the impact of security in our contemporary social world. These issues, and many others, transcend disciplinary boundaries and create the need for a multidisciplinary analysis of how, why, when, and by whom security is deployed, constructed, institutionalized, and structured. Likewise, studying the strategies and processes by which security is challenged and disputed also entails a multidisciplinary approach. To understand how individual, local, national, and international securitization is produced, reproduced, and transformed, as well as how actors are differentially involved in these processes, requires a consideration of different disciplinary expressions of security. If this book gently shakes the relative disciplinary isolation of security scholars and starts to move the conversation in the direction of a multidisciplinary study of security, it will have achieved its objective.

The cross-disciplinary approach advocated in the present volume offers several advantages for students of security. It liberates scholars from pre-emptive rebuttal of their work as being *only* an importation of work done in another discipline. Scholars are sometimes held dismissively to be borrowers or importers, as if these scholars took the

“easy road” by “simply” translating work done in another discipline and tailoring it to their own research theme. International Relations has been (and still is) particularly vulnerable in this regard. Take, for example, the constructivist approach in International Relations – an approach that stresses the social construction of world politics and that is the current dominant perspective among International Relations scholars (even in the United States), according to a recent survey (Maliniak *et al.* 2012). Not so long ago, most constructivists were regarded with contempt as merely translators of work done in sociology (in fact, some would argue that such an attitude still persists in certain sub-fields). Constructivists have gone to great lengths to justify the merits of their approach in its own right, without turning their backs on the fact that that approach has been deeply influenced by sociologists. Acknowledging a multidisciplinary perspective in the study of security invites scholars to move away from the binary distinction of importers/exporters by legitimising and reinforcing cross-disciplinary dialogue. The approach also encourages the consideration of how the different disciplinary understandings of security interact and relate to one another. To be sure, some canyons might still seem too wide to be bridged. Yet, unless we begin the process of opening up cross-disciplinary dialogues on security, scholars might find themselves endlessly trapped in their narrow, discipline-specific fields of inquiry, reinventing the wheel again and again. A multidisciplinary approach encourages scholars to seek external correctives to their own literature gaps and go beyond in-field analytical stalemates.

This is not to suggest that anthropologists should become philosophers or that geographers should become psychologists. I do not wish to “discipline” scholars into embarking on interdisciplinary research projects. It is not the case that all research projects must – or should – be interdisciplinary. Nor do I want to suggest that interdisciplinarity is always, by essence, enlightening. It is not. Work done in an interdisciplinary space has both a dark and a bright side; it is not inherently beneficial. Interdisciplinarity can, for example, be instrumentalized as a disguise to justify a (often hidden) hierarchical understanding of the relationships between disciplines: that is, to produce a unidisciplinary study with “interdisciplinary sugar” on it. Translation problems can also arise, in which scholars import a partial and incomplete set of elements from a discipline to address a given issue, but leave aside the more nuanced understandings of this discipline that have been

developed over the years in the literature. Although a parsimonious shortcut might thus be obtained, it is gained at the great expense of exactitude, richness, and complexity.

While acknowledging the importance of these issues, I argue that multidisciplinary studies can offer a unique and insightful approach to an issue, provided that they are structured in a way that allows different disciplines to actually engage in a meaningful debate around a set of mutual concerns. The contributors to this volume certainly demonstrate that a healthy dose of willingness to communicate across disciplines can go a long way toward enhancing, deepening, and strengthening our understanding of the multifaceted expressions of security.

The second contribution of this book is that it offers a rich and unparalleled understanding of how security is understood, studied, and theorized within the social sciences. The contributions included in this volume bring together essays by leading scholars in Anthropology, Criminology, International Political Economy, Geography, Law, Philosophy, Political Science/International Relations, Psychology, and Sociology.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging that each discipline has its preferred way of framing a research question, of searching for hypotheses, and of conducting research, the contributors were asked to discuss and assess the following four points:

### 1. Research questions

What are the fundamental questions orienting the research on security in your discipline? Is there a large consensus about the benefits of organising the scholarship around these central questions?

### 2. Theoretical perspectives

Are there dominant theories of security in your discipline? Which perspectives are considered marginal? Is the primary objective of the research to propose nomothetic theory building or idiographic explanation?

### 3. Research methods

How is the concept of security studied in your discipline? Is there a dominant research method? Do we observe a clear demarcation between qualitative and quantitative scholarship?

<sup>1</sup> The limitation of the present discussion to scholars from these particular disciplines is not intended to imply that other disciplines have nothing meaningful to say about security. They do. Sadly, however, a selection had to be made for feasibility and length purposes.

#### 4. Strengths and limits

What are the biggest strengths and limits of your discipline in the way security is studied and theorized? Would a more interdisciplinary approach to the concept of security help in reducing the identified limits of your discipline?

Although the discussion centres around these questions, the contributors were strongly invited to go beyond a traditional literature review to seize on the prime opportunity to push other disciplines' boundaries and encourage them to seriously evaluate the way they study and theorize security. The results are insightful, commanding, and challenging.

In this chapter, I introduce five unifying conceptual elements and areas of common ground that a multidisciplinary approach to security provides: (i) the referent objects of security are multiples; (ii) the processual nature of security; (iii) the objective and subjective dimensions of security; (iv) the instrumentalization of security as a tool for some other purposes; and (v) the importance of methodological pluralism to a compelling and thorough analysis of security. The first section of this chapter discusses each of these unifying elements in more detail. The second section presents the contributions of each chapter, focusing on the substantive research and analytical tools that each discipline offers, while intertwining and situating these contributions within a multidisciplinary study of security.

#### Toward a multidisciplinary study of security

While there has been a tendency in the literature on security to consolidate the research into particular disciplines, a need is emerging to zoom in on commonalities rather than differences. The time has come to recognize and harness the strengths of each discipline, and to identify fruitful commonalities that contribute to our understanding of security. One of the objectives is to bolster current research on security by moving the conversation away from disciplinary isolation; sophisticated theoretical and empirical studies do demonstrate the veracity and usefulness of elements of each discipline, an observation that calls implicitly for further investigation into the complementarity of disciplines. Focusing on the factors that unite security scholars, rather than those which separate them, can help us to consolidate security scholarship, allow us to better connect our research with contemporary social

world, and open new avenues of collaborative research that have only been tackled in isolation in the past. As the contributions assembled in this volume demonstrate, five unifying conceptual elements of security can be identified. In the next few pages, I turn my attention to each one of them.

### *Security has multiple referent objects*

In the past two decades, scholars from a variety of disciplines have broken wide open the box of the referent object – i.e., the question of what needs to be securitized. The diversification of the referent objects of security in all disciplines is striking. Whereas the state has been for a long time almost the sole referent object of security studies in Geography and International Relations, other referent objects have gained (and are still gaining) increasing attention of late. As Le Billon points out, while some geographers still consider geography as a discipline at the service of statecraft and be deeply connected with state security interests, others have engaged with broader security agendas, including global warming, population displacement, food and health insecurity, and disaster prevention. In a similar vein, while “national security” was one of the signature concepts of International Relations scholarship in the years following World War II, this field of research has witnessed an explosion of referent objects of security. Security scholars in International Relations have increasingly turned their attention to the environment, ethnic relations, immigration, cyberspace, identity, and gender issues, to name just a few.

While Geography and International Relations have increasingly moved away from a sole focus on state security in recent years, Anthropology has moved somewhat in the other direction. Some anthropologists have lately begun to discuss security in the terms established by the state. For instance, in the context of the United States’ “war on terror,” some anthropologists have offered their expertise on “enemy culture” in the hope of helping the United States to wage counter-insurgency campaigns more effectively (the Human Terrain System program). This approach, which represents the mainstream perspective that has lost its hegemony in Geography and International Relations, is considered marginal in Anthropology. Yet, the mere existence and influence of this approach in a discipline such as Anthropology is revealing of the increasing diversification of

referent objects of security in social sciences. In other words, while the diversification of security referent objects has caused a shift away from national security in the disciplines of geography and International Relations, it has led in Anthropology to a renewed focus on the state's defined security imperatives.

Not everyone sees the explosion of referent objects in positive terms, however. In Geography, scholars have argued for the need for a closer engagement with issues of war and peace. For some, the vitality and relevance of Geography "is sustained by engaging relevant topics and other disciplines: the key, real world issue is war and peace, and peace studies is the relevant body of literature" (Flint 2003, 166). Flint's exhortation suggests that, rather than casting itself as a vector for the diversification of security referent objects, one of the biggest contributions that Geography can make to the study of security is precisely not to deviate from its focus on war.

The most vocal resistance to a wider understanding of security referent objects has come from International Relations. Scholars have argued that an "excessive" expansion of security studies threatens its intellectual coherence. According to "orthodox" or "traditional" security scholars, any field of study – even such a massive one as security studies in International Relations – cannot and should not be too elastic. Even though they are sometimes artificial, biased, and restrictive, boundaries are nonetheless a fundamental axiom of a field of research (Miller 2010). Advocates of this standpoint have forcefully argued that to study security is to study "the conditions that make the use of [military] force more likely, the ways that the use of force affects individuals, states, and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war" (Walt 1991, 212, see also Wohlforth 2009). For most critical-theory-attuned security scholars, this call exemplified the narrow and obtuse nature of the orthodox strand of security studies; for orthodox security scholars, however, it represented a much-needed attempt to provide the field with coherence and delimitation.

In many respects, these calls for understanding security only in military terms are not only strikingly unidisciplinary in nature but also seem to speak to what security studies should be rather than offering an analysis of current expressions of security. Clearly, other issues than war have entered the realm of security in the past decades, and defining security as (only) the study of the role of military forces in war does not

sit well with the vast majority of the literature discussed in this book. Equally, it makes very little sense to exclude the use of military force from security studies – an argument rarely heard in some critical security studies journals. Instead of searching for what security scholars should be studying, which incidentally increases the likelihood of proliferating calls for scholarly closure, the central questions that all contributors to this volume underscore are: why do some issues get securitized and not others?; do all the referent objects of security possess the same significance?; does the interaction of referent objects, and consequently security itself, express itself in scalar terms, or not?

### *Security is processual*

Security is not a fixed attribute or a dispositional quality, but a dynamic and complex process. It is constantly in flux and it does not express itself in a flat, stable or variation-free way. Security, then, does not imply finality, as the process can never be fully completed; security needs to be produced and reproduced all the time. This understanding of security dislodges the scholarship from a research programme that seeks to capture the essence of security, and it consolidates studies on how, when, why, and to what effects an issue becomes securitized.

Several disciplines explicitly recognize that security is processual. Critical anthropologists understand security not as a reality immanent in the public arena but as a process that is produced, reproduced, and transformed through cultural and political forces at work in contemporary societies. In International Law, the process of security is often put in place and then invoked to justify measures that deviate from rules that would otherwise apply. Geographers have recently focused much of their attention on how particular issues are framed within security narratives and practices. Starting from the premise that framing a phenomenon as a security issue is both a performative event and a social process, geographers have focused much of their attention on underscoring the descriptive, prescriptive, and reflexive aspects of the processes of securitization. Equally, many criminologists understand security as a process founded in ambiguity, uncertainty, and incompleteness. As Jan Froestad, Clifford Shearing, and Melani van der Merve points out, multiple calls have been made by criminologists to embrace the study of security rather than to fight it, precisely because security does not breed certainty.



A similar situation is arising in Sociology, where an increasing number of scholars are advocating for a break from the traditional focus on attributes and vectors of economic security or food security to a study of the institutional, discursive, and ‘practice’ processes by which certain phenomena get to be classified as security issues. In International Relations, one of the most dynamic strands in security studies of late has been research on the process of integrating an issue into security frameworks. Debates persist as to whether the process follows the logic of exception, which holds that speech acts labelling an issue as an existential security threat best explain the securitization process, or the logic of routine, which contends that issues become securitized through the routinized practices of particular social agents (Bourbeau 2014a). Yet, scholars on both sides of the fence share the consensus that security is processual.

In a related way, if security is a process that is constructed, reconstructed and transformed time and time again, then surely the study of security invites analysis of other social mechanisms occurring prior, concurrently, and subsequently to security. For instance, Werner, inspired by the work of Judith Shklar (1986), juxtaposes the logic of security with the logic of legalism in order to highlight and to illustrate why lawyers find it increasingly difficult to accept that international law in fact contain provisions that prioritize the logic of security over the logic of legalism. Such lawyers have, consequently, sought to contain, limit, and fight the logic of security by subjecting it to international legal standards and accepted canons of interpretations. Whereas the politicization process seem to remain within the disciplinary boundaries of International Relations and has been hypothesized as a process that leads to security on some occasions (Williams 2011; Zürn *et al.* 2012), desecuritization (broadly defined as the unmaking of the securitization process) is studied in both Geography and in International Relations. Geographers, such as Hyndman (2007), have argued for the need for desecuritization, on the grounds that security practices create uneven contemporary regimes of power, while heated debates are currently unfolding in International Relations concerning the ethics of desecuritization (Browning and McDonald 2013; Floyd 2014; Hansen 2012; Vuori 2011). Resilience is another social mechanisms interacting with the process of security in Psychology, Geography, and International Relations, where it is interpreted, respectively, as the capacity of an individual to bounce back following a threatening event,

the ability of an ecosystem to adapt and regain its equilibrium after a disturbance, and the pattern of adjustments adopted by a society or an individual in the face of endogenous/exogenous shocks (Berkes *et al.* 2003; Bourbeau 2013; Luthar 2003). Elsewhere, I have argued that the process of securitizing an issue is the disturbance in the face of which a resilient strategy is deployed in order to challenge, counter, and debunk the dominant security-attuned reading of the issue at hand. The collective strategy is not to take the issue out of the security realm (i.e., to de-securitize it) but rather to build social and community resilience in the face of an increasingly securitized world (Bourbeau 2014b, 2015).

### *Objectivity, subjectivity, intersubjectivities, and security*

A central theme in several disciplines is the distinction between objective and subjective dimensions of security. In Philosophy, the objective/subjective dichotomy juxtaposes the idea, points out Jonathan Herington, that security is the actual protection against basic forms of violence with the idea that security is constituted by freedom from the fear of violence. This debate exhibits striking parallels with the much-talked about concept of ontological security (Giddens 1991; Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Noble 2005; Steele 2008).

While the objective/subjective differentiation finds its way into Criminology literature, it is at the heart of the scholarship in Sociology. As Lisa Stampnitsky and Greggor Mattson note, sociological studies on security are divided into two strands. One sees security as an “objective, real state of affairs” and seeks “to measure the realities of security” in fields of research including economic security, social security, and family security. The other strand of literature emphasizes the subjective, socially constructed dimension of security, including how individuals perceive security dangers and the production of knowledge associated with discourses about security.

In International Relations, the objective/subjective dichotomy goes back to one of the founding texts of the discipline. In the early 1950s, Arnold Wolfers (1952, 485) argued that “security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.” From 1950 to the mid 1980s, the focus was decidedly on the objective components, with the military agenda of security questions surrounding