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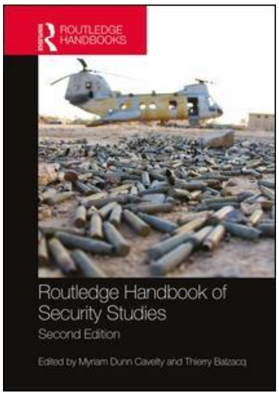

Routledge Handbook of Security Studies

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Critical Security Studies

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315753393.ch5
David Mutimer
Published online on: 13 Jul 2016

How to cite :- David Mutimer. 13 Jul 2016, *Critical Security Studies from:* Routledge Handbook of Security Studies Routledge
Accessed on: 01 Apr 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315753393.ch5

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5

CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES

David Mutimer

> The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.
>
> *(Marx 1888)*

This noted aphorism by Karl Marx may be said to mark the origin of modern critical social theory. While the point might be to change the world, it is not the only point. Marx is not suggesting abandoning the philosophers' search for understanding, but rather advocates understanding the world *in order* to change it. It is likely that most, if not all, forms of social theory would accept Marx's point. Even a liberal thinker such as Francis Fukuyama, who argues that the great struggles of history are over, would accept that social theory should seek to understand the operations of our now-eternal liberal democratic present to make things 'better': increase the overall wealth and freedom of the world's people, and include more and more in the virtuous circle of liberal democratic governance and market economies (Fukuyama 1992).

Liberal improvements to the state of the world, however, mark no *fundamental* change in the organization of society. They seek to improve the operation of the system as it is; certainly such improvement is change, but it is not the change sought by those who would identify themselves as critical social theorists. Social critique assumes that there are fundamental features of the world as we find it that must be changed. The job of theory is to identify and interpret those features for the purposes of animating their change. While critical theorists part ways with their liberal counterparts at this point, the conservatives and reactionaries would still be along for the ride. These latter would see the world as having deteriorated from some previous better phase, and the point of conservative theory is to identify the way those problems function in the present, in order to animate a change, returning society to some previous (possibly only perceived) better time.

Critical theories reject the premise that the world was fundamentally better in times past or places distant. Rather, they seek to make changes to the fundamental social organization of the present, so that future social organization frees those presently oppressed by the operation of the world as we find it. This freeing of the oppressed is termed 'emancipation', and the orientation of politics towards future improvement in social life is why this form of politics is sometimes termed 'progressive'.

What, then, are the fundamentals of society that require change in order to produce a progressive politics? Marx's answer was that political identity is determined by the individual's relation to the production process (their social class). Those who own the means of production in any society benefit at the expense of others, and so the 'point' is to reveal this fundamental organization of society, to mobilize the oppressed to change society in their interest. However, what if society is not fundamentally about production, in the way Marx suggests? What if the various identities produced in activities other than production are not subordinate to their class identity? Indeed, perhaps there is no single fundamental nature to social organization in all times and in all places, but rather the various forms of social activity and identity organized differently, contingently at different times and in different places, and so progressive social change must look to multiple sites of fundamental oppression. As industrial capitalism grew and became globalized, and particularly as capitalism became post-industrial, a body of social theory grew that made just such a claim.

What I have sketched, in admittedly a very schematic way, is the broad scope of critical social theory and its primary line of division. Those who follow Marx's theory of a fundamentally class-based society are found on one side of this division. This stream is often termed 'German', in that Marx and a good number of those that followed him were either German or based in Germany – most notably, in the twentieth century, a group of theorists gathered in Frankfurt (the 'Frankfurt school'), who coined the term Critical Theory. On the other side are those who argue that class and production are not fundamental. This second stream is often termed 'French' for the influence of a number of French thinkers in a tradition also usually labelled 'post-structural'. Foremost among these are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard. There are, of course, near-infinite complexities within these broad areas of social theory, and considerable overlap at their margins. No post-structural thinker, for example, would reject the importance of the basic Marxist critique of capitalist society to understanding (and changing) the present. On the other hand, there is a significant stream of post-Marxist thinking that takes culture and ideology very seriously indeed. My objective in this chapter is to explore what has happened as critical social theory, in its many varieties, has been used on the questions of international security to forge a field of study generally termed Critical Security Studies.

I begin with a short discussion of the origins of Critical Security Studies, as it emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of the Cold War and in response to the problems that collapse revealed with traditional Security Studies. Initially, the leading theoretical position identified with the term Critical Security was constructivism, and so I follow the discussion of origins with a short exploration of the literature on social construction. There is a real question, however, as to whether the constructivist position fits with a commitment to *critical* social theory, and so that section will be followed by two that explore the deployment of first post-Marxist and then post-structural social theory to questions of security. I conclude by considering a recent attempt to bridge the divisions I sketch in the rest of the chapter, revealing in the process some of the ways that some divisions appear inescapable.

Origins

Security Studies was, in its inception and early practice, very much a 'policy science'. As it grew along with the nuclear age, the concern of Security Studies was, in the words of one of its staunchest defenders, 'the study of the threat, use, and control of military force' (Walt 1991). It was concerned with interpreting the world of military strategy, not to change it fundamentally, but to make it better on its own terms. Providing direct policy advice to those in control of states' militaries, particularly to nuclear-armed militaries, was very much a part of the Security Studies understanding of its purpose.

The end of the Cold War and the change that came with it opened what has been termed a ‘thinking space’ in the study of global security (George 1994). In large part, this thinking space resulted from the manifest failure of political realism, the theory underpinning traditional Security Studies, not only to predict the end of the Cold War, but even to account for it once it had happened (Gusterson 1999). That failure created conditions in which self-consciously critical work to questions of security could be taken seriously in the academy.

What has come to be known as Critical Security Studies grew from this moment in political and intellectual time. The term itself emerged on the margins of a conference held at York University in 1994, and served as the title for the volume produced by that conference. That book, *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, is still seen as an important point of origin of the Critical Security Studies idea. The book and label, however, really served as a point around which a number of strands of intellectual development could coalesce. A group of graduate students working with Ken Booth at the University of Wales Aberystwyth were bringing post-Marxist critical theory to bear on questions of security (Booth 2007: xv–xvi). A number of other scholars, mainly at the University of Minnesota and York University, were developing ideas about constructivism in relation to security (Latham 1998; Milliken 2001; Mutimer 1998; Price 1997; Weldes 1999; Williams 1992, 1998). In other places, ideas drawn from French social theory were also being turned to questions of security (Campbell 1992; Dalby 1990).

At the same time, there were at least two other strands of thought that drew on forms of social critique to think about security, but which have not subsequently been captured, by and large, by the ‘Critical Security Studies’ label. The first is variously known as ‘the Copenhagen School’ or ‘securitization studies’ (see Chapter 6 in this volume). Perhaps more interestingly, a range of scholars were thinking about gender and International Relations (IR), including international security (Enloe 1983; Peterson 1992; Sylvester 1994; Whitworth 1998). The Feminist IR scholarship that has grown from this strand of thinking, despite significant overlaps with the work of Critical Security Studies, and severe theoretical divisions within it, continues to exist outside the ambit of Critical Security Studies (see Chapter 8 in this volume).

Security and social construction

The notion of social construction was introduced to the study of international politics just as the Cold War was ending, and was quickly picked up by students of international security (Wendt 1987, 1992). Constructivism builds on the basic notion that social life is a product of social practice. Social construction was very appealing to those seeking to rethink security with the demise of the Cold War. It suggested a context in which the rapid change brought about by the Cold War’s end was conceivable (if the Cold War was a construct, it could end, where realism seemed to suggest it could not). It also suggested that the security futures were, at least in part, open, as the constitution of those futures would depend on social practice rather than immutable law.

The appeal of constructivism is reflected in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, and perhaps even more clearly in an article published by one of its editors the following year. In this article, Keith Krause organized the research agenda of the new Critical Security Studies under three rubrics: the construction of threats and responses; the construction of the objects of security; and possibilities for transforming the security dilemma (Krause 1998). The assumption underlying this classification is that security is about the identification of *threats* to a particular *referent object*, and the formulation of policy *responses* to those threats. Traditional Security Studies would accept this notion of security easily, but would give singular answers to each: the threats are military, the referent object is the state, and the responses are the scope of strategic policy. Thinking in terms of social construction opens the prospect of other answers, as it renders the traditional answers contingent. It therefore also opens an important range of what are known as 'how' questions (Doty 1993: 298; Weldes 1999: 15–16). That is, even if the traditional answers are a correct reflection of the world as we find it, how is it that they came to be that way, given that they are constructed, contingent features of the world? These are the questions Krause argues were driving the research in his first two categories (Krause 1998: 308–9).

Krause's third rubric is of a different order. Here the concern becomes normative: how can the way in which security is practised be transformed? This third group of work is normative in at least two ways. Not only is it concerned with a preferred future, but it is grounded in the assumption that social norms are an important part of international political life, even international security. Some early work explored the place of normative constraints on the use of weapons (for example: Price 1997; Tannenwald 2007). There has also been a constructivist interest in the place of norms in the end of the Cold War, and the way norms are produced and institutionalized in contemporary international society to promote security (Tannenwald and Wohlforth 2005; Ghecui 2008). In particular, the place of 'norm entrepreneurs' has been studied, most notably in relation to the creation of the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines (Price 1988; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Price and Reus-Smit 2004; Ulbert and Risse 2005).

As important as constructivism remains in the study of world politics and international security, it is an open question whether it is critical in the sense set out at the beginning of this chapter (cf. Krause 1998: 299f). Clearly, critical social theory accepts the premise of social construction: Were society not produced in and through its practices, transformation would not be possible. However, critical theory is aimed at producing fundamental change of a particular kind, and the possibility, let alone the necessity, of such change is not inherent in the constructivist position (Campbell 1998a: 207–27).[1]

Security and post-Marxism

There can be no doubt as to the commitment to fundamental change of those drawing their primary inspiration for rethinking security from the German, or post-Marxist tradition of critical theory. The nature of that commitment was captured early on in a signal contribution from Ken Booth. In his 1991 article, 'Security and Emancipation', Booth set out the political goal of a post-Marxist informed Critical Security Studies:

> Security means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do [. . .] Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin. Emancipation, not power or order, produces true security. Emancipation, theoretically, is security.
>
> *(Booth 1991: 319)*

Booth has spent most of the intervening 20 years working out the implications of thinking about security as emancipation, in the post-Marxist sense of the term. Many of the intellectual foundations for this work were contributed by a colleague of Booth's at Aberystwyth, Richard Wyn Jones, whose 1999 book *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory* provides an exegesis of Frankfurt school critical theory. His object is 'to lay the conceptual foundations for an alternative critical Security Studies' (Wyn Jones 1999: 165). Those foundations were based on a rethinking of both security and strategy through the intellectual lens provided by the Frankfurt school. He argues that, seen in this way, security is 'deeper', 'broader', 'extended to referents other than the state', and 'focussed, crucially, on emancipation'. And he turns to the work of

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci to reconfigure the relationship between security theory and practice in such a way that 'proponents of critical Security Studies can not only interpret the world but also play a role in changing it' (Wyn Jones 1999: 167).

In several iterations, culminating in his *Theory of World Security* (2007), Ken Booth has built on the foundations that Wyn Jones laid to develop a critical theory of world security, which is 'both a theoretical commitment and a political orientation concerned with the construction of world security' (Booth 2007: 30). As a 'theoretical commitment', Booth's theory of world security begins like that of Wyn Jones – with the Frankfurt school and Gramsci. However, he considers these two to be neither sufficient nor in their entirety necessary for his theoretical framework. He therefore engages in what he terms, following Hannah Arendt, *Perlenfischerei* (pearl fishing): 'diving into, first, the critical tradition in social theory, and then the radical tradition in international relations theory. The goal is to find pearls of ideas that might be strung together to make a theory of world security for our time' (Booth 2007: 40).

The theoretical framework Booth develops from his pearls defies easy summary, as it is grand in both scope and execution (Booth 2007: 209–78). He organizes the framework into three levels. The first is 'transcendental theory', or put another way, his ontological claims: 'The transcendental dimension of the overall theoretical framework [. . .] is constructed out of eight main is-propositions. 'Human sociality' is the best overall label for them, implying as it does the radical possibilities immanent in the biology of being human' (Booth 2007: 210). He conceives human society as being constituted in our interaction, but with the individual as the ultimate referent of security. The second level is epistemological, which he terms 'pure theory', and which is a Frankfurt-inspired take on the constitutive nature of knowledge and the critical possibilities of theory. Finally, his third level is 'practical theory', which he terms 'emancipatory realism' (Booth 2007: 249–77). While the shift in Booth's terminology from 'utopian' to 'emancipatory' realism is in part due to a desire to escape the eschatological overtones of utopia (Booth 2007: 90), the ghost of final goal clearly haunts this project. The goal in question is a communitarian one, which he derives first from Kant (Booth 2007: 80–7) and more recently from Andrew Linklater's elaborations of Jurgen Habermas' ideas (Booth 2007: 54–7). While he explicitly eschews the possibility of blueprints, Booth articulates quite an elaborate vision for an institutionalized world community based on the principles of the Enlightenment (Booth 2007: 124–33 and 427–70).

Theory of World Security stands as the most extensively developed contribution to the post-Marxist (German, Italian, or Welsh) approach to Critical Security Studies. It is long on theoretical development and political desire, but short on engagement with the world of security. This is not to say that there is not an extensive discussion of the state of the world in Booth's text, for there is, but rather that the discussion is not clearly informed by the theory that precedes it, rather than by Booth's own insight and erudition. So, while the post-Marxist approach to critical security is beginning to articulate a political project, it is as yet deficient in turning its critical eye to the concrete questions of contemporary security on which such a project can ultimately be built.

Security and post-structuralism

For all his commitment to theoretical pluralism, there is an oyster bed of international studies into which Booth will not dive in search of his theoretical pearls, and that is the other broad division of critical social theory with which I began: post-structuralism (Booth 2007: 462 and 175–8) (see Chapter 7 in this volume). This work draws on a number of social theorists and philosophers, though a few stand out as being more widely cited than others. These are the French thinkers mentioned at the outset: Foucault, Derrida, and Baudrillard. The range of themes and issues across this literature is similarly broad and varied, but there are, perhaps, four of particular significance to security: the question of identity, that of ethics, and latterly, the biopolitics of security and the subjectivity of the material.

The relationship between identity and security was among the first important themes considered by scholars working in the French tradition. While constructivism had raised the question of identity, those in the post-structural tradition drew on the radical notion of the performative constitution of identity, developed out of the work of Michel Foucault and others, to think about security. David Campbell's work is signal in this regard, with his two major books exploring a range of questions around identity and security (Campbell 1992, 1998b). In *Writing Security*, he examines the ways in which discourses of fear animate a politics of security constitutive of the US, and in particular how difference is produced as 'other' in such discourses. In *National Deconstruction*, Campbell looks at the violent effects of such othering in the case of the war and its aftermath in Bosnia. Bosnia is also the site for a more recent work on a similar theme by Lene Hansen (Hansen 2006) and Elizabeth Dauphinée (Dauphinée 2008; also 2013).

The importance of the wars in the former Yugoslavia to post-structural thinking on security is not accidental. The 'thinking space' brought about by the end of the Cold War into which French philosophy-inspired work entered coincided with the collapse of Yugoslavia and the return of both war and concentration camps to the European continent (George 1994). The latter were particularly important, because the routine criticism of post-structuralism was that it had no politics, and particularly had no way to stand up to 'the worst'. It should be no surprise, then, that the 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia, complete with horrifying images of emaciated prisoners behind barbed wire, should capture the attention of post-structural thinkers on questions of security. Nor should it be surprising that the turn to examine Bosnia led these thinkers to ask questions about an ethical politics: how, in a world shorn of grand narratives or a necessary grounding for ethico-political judgements, can you respond to the violent destruction of the other? Answering this question has spawned a rich literature, much of which takes its theoretical cues from the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida (Campbell 1998b; Campbell and Shapiro 1999; Dauphinée 2008 and 2013; Edkins 2003; Lisle 2006).

If the wars of the former Yugoslavia commanded attention in the 1990s, after the events of 11 September 2001 that attention has tended to shift to the various issues raised by the terror attacks and, in particular, the responses to them. A number of thinkers influenced by post-structural thought have explored concerns around terrorism and security, with many deploying Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics (Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008). One notable programme of research has been organized under the 'Liberty and Security' label (CHALLENGE 2008). The programme considers the relationship between security and liberty in the European response to terror as a 'technique of government', as Foucault would call it (Bigo 2000, 2006). They explore the means by which governmental practices produce acceptable images of enemy others who can be violently excluded in the name of 'security'. Indeed, the production of the violently excluded other runs through much of the post-structural work on security after 2001, with many scholars drawing on Italian social theorist Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty and the exception to think about contemporary practices of security (Edkins et al. 2004; Dauphinée and Masters 2007).

Throughout the Cold War, security was a very abstract concept, as it increasingly centred around building weapons no one expected to use, governed by strategies that were little more than thought-experiments. The past twenty years have reminded us in no uncertain terms about the materiality of security: whether it is the stark return of barbed wire and emaciation in Bosnia, the dust-covered New Yorkers running from collapsed buildings, 'stress positions' and 'water boarding' in Guantanamo Bay, or the use of armed drones in what used to be called assassination but is now more commonly referred to as 'targeted killing.' Security thinkers have recently begun thinking again about the material in this context, often turning to another French thinker for some guidance: Bruno Latour. Latour asks us to think about 'assemblages' of the human and non-human and consider that the agency which produces the effects we want to understand (and judge) is distributed across these assemblages (Latour 2005). To take a relatively clear example, a drone flown against a target in Yemen but controlled in Arizona can be thought of as an assemblage of drone and operator, but also of the strategy and strategists that govern it, as well as the logistic and communication chains that join it. Agency rests not only in the drone operator, and also in other human sites of decision, but crucially in the non-human drones and other technological components in the assemblage (Grondin 2013; Walters 2014). Other scholars have turned this approach to a range of issues of contemporary security, from arms control (Bourne 2012) to torture (van Veeren 2014).

The post-structural work on security is permeated by a concern with the relationship between security and the production of difference as dangerous 'other'. Scholars explore the ways in which representational and other governmental practices produce some as 'secured' and others as 'excluded' from the realm of security, an exclusion that is often effected violently. The politics of such work, therefore, continues in the emancipatory tradition of critical theory: exposing and exploring the production of exclusion for the purposes of informing a transformatory politics in favour of those excluded. The exclusions are produced contingently, in temporally and spatially specific locations, and so 'emancipations' can only be effected in a similarly specific and contingent fashion. The uncertainty of such an approach to political change is most concisely captured by Derrida's notion of democracy that is 'to come' (Campbell 1998b: 165–244). Democracy, in Derrida's sense, is a goal that is always deferred, rather than an institutional framework that can be applied; it is an ethos that informs politics, rather than a politics itself.

Bridging the divides?

In 2006 a group of European scholars committed to the critical study of security attempted to draw together some of the disparate approaches that I have outlined here as quite separate (CASE Collective 2006). The attempt was interesting in a number of ways. The original article was published as a collectively authored piece of work, with a potentially changeable group of authors (CASE Collective 2007), and perhaps just as unusually, it was titled a 'manifesto', making its politics immediately apparent. That politics is set out as breaking down the competitive individualism of contemporary scholarship, and overcoming the divisions that have emerged in critical approaches to security, specifically in the collective's case among the 'Copenhagen', 'Aberystwyth', and 'Paris' schools (CASE Collective 2006: 444–5).

The attempt to overcome internecine divisions and establish a broad research programme that can accommodate the variations of approach that have developed in non-traditional Security Studies is certainly laudable. However, what is particularly notable is that the responses to this initiative, almost without fail, drew attention to the exclusions that were effected by the CASE Collective's attempt at inclusion. Christine Sylvester's 'Anatomy of a Footnote', calls the Collective to account for the exclusion of feminist scholarship (Sylvester 2007). Two others take the Collective to task for its focus on Europe, and the exclusions that it thereby produces (Behnke 2007; Salter 2007). Indeed, Salter went further and joined with his colleague Miguel de Larrinaga to respond at length with 'Cold CASE: a manifesto for Canadian critical Security Studies', reviewing the Canadian contributions to Critical Security Studies (de Larrinaga and Salter 2014; Salter and de Larrinaga 2014).

More recently, Anthony Burke has tried a different tack with the effect of overcoming the divisions in Critical Security Studies. Burke takes an explicitly normative approach to security, drawing on the cosmopolitan tradition in international affairs to provide an improved framework for understanding and responding to global security threats (Burke 2013, 2015). The cosmopolitan tradition has deep roots in liberal political theory, particularly the tradition associated with Immanuel Kant, but has also been elaborated in recent Marxist-inflected International Relations scholarship (Linklater 1988). Burke's own work which has led him to this point is very much in a post-structural tradition (Burke 2007). The responses to his security cosmopolitanism suggest the difficulty of bridging divisions. The liberal overtones concern those who worry about the violence that liberal intervention has brought in the name of universal ends (Cooper and Turner 2013; Bilgin 2015). Others argue that while of course he is right, such a framework does not go nearly far enough (Kaldor 2013; Richmond 2015).

Conclusion

Despite a shared commitment to a security scholarship that informs a politics of fundamental change in the interest of those presently disadvantaged, 'Critical Security Studies' remains riven by variations in approach and attitude. The greatest of those divisions is informed by the split in the wider world of critical social theory between those of a 'German' and those of a 'French' orientation. They are joined, however, by constructivists who seem to fit neither of these geographic markers, by members of the Copenhagen School who seem at times to fit both, and by feminists whose work reaches across and beyond the other divisions.

Attempts at bridging these divides tend rather to fall into them. The problem may perhaps be traced back to the quotation with which I began, in which Marx articulates the point of critical scholarship to be to change the world. It has proved impossible to agree with Marx's assumption that there is a singular 'world', even a singular world of security, which is to be transformed. If the point is to change *worlds*, to achieve *emancipations*, then the multiplicity of approaches is not only to be expected, but to be welcomed. Each in its own way focuses critical thought on different, necessary sites of change, and so they may together inform a politics of multiple transformations. As the CASE Collective learned, however, simply willing such a broad, inclusive Critical Security Study will not make it so.

Note

1 For a clear example of a non-transformatory constructivist theory of world politics, see Wendt (1999).

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