

Reflections on Critical Security Studies: A Schismatic Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT: *The article provides a narrative of the label's antecedents and its development, which has remained incomplete since the early 1990s. It provides a partial history of a label. Besides, it is partial both in that it is not and cannot be complete, in that it is partial in the way all other history is partial. 'Critical security studies' is the label. Thus, the primary claims of the main divisions set out: constructivism, critical theory, and post-structuralism, which have emerged with the literature to which the label has been applied. Invariably, the article advocates that Critical Security Studies need to foster an 'ethos of critique' in the study of security, as well as the fact that the study is an excellent example of that habitual character and disposition of individuals, groups, races, etc., or moral significance directed towards Critical Security Studies.*

KEYWORDS: *Reflection, Critical Security, Constructivism, Critical Theory, and Post-structuralism*

INTRODUCTION

The study provides a partial history of the label. However, it is partial in the context that it is not, and cannot be, complete, and in that one is not only the author of, but also a participant in the historical process. Thus, it is partial in the way all other history may be partial if the historian did not consider objectivity. The label in this context refers to 'Critical Security Studies'. Indeed, it is a label that has one of its origins in a conference held at York University in Canada in 1994. Invariably, it has been fought over as a label, rather more than it has been applied. However, it does not denote a coherent set of views, an 'approach' to security; rather, it indicates a desire.

In terms of some form of critique, it is a desire to move beyond the strictures of security as it was studied and practiced in the Cold War, and in particular, a desire to make that move. Undoubtedly, this is a desire articulated in the first line of the first book, titled 'Critical Security Studies': 'This book emerged out of a desire to contribute to the development of a self-consciously critical perspective within security studies' (Williams and Krause 1997: p. vii). Thus, the silhouette of security studies against which Critical Security Studies was directed has been captured by one of the proponents of the traditional approach:

Security studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use, and control of military force. It explores the conditions that make the use of 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).

This article traces the events that occurred as scholars brainstormed ideas for a self-consciously critical security study. In this regard, it outlines the major fault lines that have emerged among those initially motivated by this shared desire. The signs that have driven these fault lines were not extraneous but rather represent disagreements about the nature of critique, as well as different forms of critical security study. Furthermore, while the article delineates the sects into which critical desire has cleaved, it also sets out a range of answers to the question of what critical security studies might be. It is pertinent to note that a study on the schismatic history started in 1994.

CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES

A definition of Critical Security Studies has remained complex and controversial among scholars. Notwithstanding the avalanche of controversies in definition, some scholars have made a concerted effort to define critical security studies. Thus, our appending of the term essential to security studies is meant to imply more of an orientation toward the discipline than a precise theoretical label, and we adopt a small-c definition of critical.... Perhaps the most straightforward way to convey our sense of how critical should be understood in this context is Robert Cox's distinction between problem-solving and critical theory: the former takes "prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized ... as the given framework for action, while the latter calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how they might be in the process of changing". Our approach to security studies... 'thus begins from an analysis of the claims that make the discipline possible-not just its claims about the world, but also its underlying epistemology and ontology, which prescribe what it means to make sensible claims about the world' (William and Krause, 1997: pp x-xi).

Furthermore, an emerging school of "critical security studies (CSS) challenges conventional security studies by applying postpositivist perspectives, such as critical theory and poststructuralism. Much of this work deals with the social construction of security. Still, CSS mostly has the intent (known from poststructuralism as well as from constructivism in international relations) of showing that change is possible because things are socially constituted. (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998: 34-35). Critical security studies deal with the social construction of security. The rhetorical nature of "threat discourses is examined and criticized... Critical security studies consider not only threats as a construction, but the objects of security as well... Critical security studies...have an emancipatory goal: (Erikson, 1999:318).

Critical security studies is a subfield within the academic discipline of international politics concerned with the essential pursuit of security knowledge.

Critical knowledge implies understandings that attempt to stand outside prevailing structures, processes, ideologies, and orthodoxies, while recognizing that all conceptualizations of security derive from political/theoretical /historical perspectives. Critical theorizing does not claim objectivity but instead seeks to provide deeper understandings of oppressive attitudes and behavior with a view to developing promising ideas by which human society might overcome structural and contingent human wrongs. Security is conceived comprehensively embracing theories and practices relating to multiple referents, multiple types of threat, and multiple levels of analysis' (Booth 2007:30).

Despondently, perhaps, this all too human penchant to fragment into infinitesimal and more exclusive and exclusionary clubs affects academic movements every bit as much as it does religious and political. Moreover, any society of ideas is a potential source and expression of power. Accordingly, it provides the intellectual resources around which to mobilize people as well as resources of all sorts. Indeed, the chapter will show the division into which Critical Security Studies has expeditiously fallen, one of the shared commitments of the work it will explore is to the political power of ideas. Thus, in and through the ideas that make it meaningful, the social world is produced, which are themselves inexorably social. The proximate and likely consequence of this observation is that the study of the social world is inextricably bound up with the world it studies; it is part of the productive set of ideas that make the world.

In the period under survey, the focus on the threat, use, and control of military force imposed a series of significant strictures on the study of security. Thus, military forces are indeed the preserve of the states, and consequently, there is a normative assumption that they should be the preserve of states, notwithstanding that they are not. What is more, our standard definition of the state is an institution that has a monopoly on the legitimate means of violence. In other words, by studying the threat, use, and control of the military force, security studies the privileges of the position of the state. Undoubtedly, the state is the primary referent object of security; therefore, such an approach implies that the state is the primary object to be secured.

Whatever the case may be, the various scholars who followed the desire towards a Critical security study were perturbed by all three of these basic assumptions underlying the conventional research of security. First, they wondered whether our concern needed to be only about the state and its security. What of the security of people living within the states? In fact, the standard assumption of security studies is that the people are secure if the state is secure, however, those drawn towards Critical Security Studies wondered about those times when this was not the practice: when states ignored the security of some of their

people, when they actively oppressed some of their people, or when the state lacked the capacity to provide security for its people. They were led to wonder whether we should be thinking about referent objects besides the state.

Therefore, once you question the referent object of security, you must also ask about the nature and scope of security and, thus, of security studies. However, not everyone who questioned the referent object and the nature and scope of security would be drawn to the desire for a critical security study. Security studies, as it has been practiced, provided intellectual and, ultimately, moral support to the most powerful institution in contemporary politics: the state. Against this background, those drawn to critical security studies sought a different security politics and a different security scholarship.

THE TORONTO CONFERENCE

The Toronto Conference was held in May 1994, with the title "Strategies in Conflict: Critical Approaches to Security Studies," at York University in Toronto. A variety of scholars, from both junior and senior, with an interest in security as well as concern for the direction of security studies in the early post-Cold War period. At Toronto, during deliberations at the conference that they captioned 'Critical Security Studies', started to be applied to the intellectual project that attracted participants from far and near, to the conference. It was used as the title of the book, edited by Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, that the Conference produced: *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (1997).

Thus, the conference and book were an expression of the desire for self-consciously critical perspectives on security. Still, they both worked extremely hard to avoid articulating a single perspective in response to that desire. 'Our appending of the term critical to security studies is meant to imply more an orientation toward the discipline than a precise theoretical label...' (Williams and Krause 1997:pp.x-xi). Therefore, the book served to launch the phraseology of Critical Security Studies as well as discussed some of how Critical Security Studies has come to be defined.

Krause and Williams, in their contribution to that volume, aimed to set out the scope of a critical security study, and it has served as a cornerstone in the further development of Critical Security Studies. As noted earlier, they started their case for Critical Security Studies by considering the traditional conception of security. They questioned, and the referent object of security: who or what is to be secured? Accordingly, the conventional answer to this question is that the referent object is the state: security refers to protecting the state from external threats, and the people residing within the state's territory are considered secured to the degree that the state is secured.

In fact, when scholars discuss the breadth of the early desire for Critical Security Studies, they will often make almost immediate reference to Mohammed Ayoob's contribution: 'Defining Security: A Subaltern Realist Perspective' (Ayoob 1997). He dwelt on the preliminary challenges of Krause and Williams and, therefore, queried the assumed nature of the state in traditional security studies. Ayoob argues that the state in conventional security studies is the state of the advanced, industrial North. He seeks to expand that notion of security to account for the security concerns of the majority of the world's states, concerns that 'mirror the major security concerns evinced by most Western European State makers during the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries' (Ayoob 1997:121-122). With the critical security studies text, a range of scholars responded to this invitation in a variety of ways, laying the foundations for the variation in critical security studies.

Aside from the foregoing, the year after Critical Security Studies had appeared, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde published *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). This book was intended to serve as a relatively comprehensive statement of what has come to be known as 'Securitization Studies', or the Copenhagen School. (Bill McSweeney 1996). The book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* is built around two significant conceptual developments in the study of security: Barry Buzan's notion of sectoral analysis of security, as well as Ole Wæver's concept of 'securitization.' Although both ideas have aided in informing the broad church of Critical Security Studies, it is the notion of 'Securitization' that has been the more theoretically important. Perhaps 'securitization' is the most significant conceptual development to have explicitly emerged within security studies in response to the epistemological challenge noted by Krause and Williams.

The Copenhagen School has sought to distance itself from Critical Security Studies, despite this influence on Critical Security Studies. Thus, in part, this is a function of an incoherence inherent in the approach between the sectoral analysis of security and the concept of securitization. As it had developed before merging into the Copenhagen School, the sectoral approach draws primarily on objectivist epistemology, while securitization opens the possibility of the radical openness of social life. Put differently, the epistemological underpinnings of the concept of securitization do not cohere with those of the sectoral analysis of security. In yet another genre, it is the epistemology of securitization, nonetheless, that coheres with the desire for a critical security study. As could be gleaned in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, the authors argue that Critical Security Studies is informed by poststructuralism and constructivism and, as such, is open to the possibility of social change. They suggest that the Copenhagen approach, by contrast, recognizes the social construction of social life; however, it contends that construction in the security realm is sufficiently stable over the long run that it can be treated as

objective. Moreover, they resolve the incoherence by assuming long-term stability and enabling a largely positivist epistemology (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998: 34-35).

Therefore, the categorical separation of the Copenhagen School from Critical Security Studies did more than announce that Copenhagen is *sui generis*. Undoubtedly, one function of the text has been to create 'Critical Security Studies' as something more concrete and less heterogeneous than it was initially. Indeed, the Copenhagen authors discuss Critical Security Studies as 'an emerging school', and they shorten it to CSS. As stated above, they ascribe two specific theoretical positions to this emerging school: poststructuralism and constructivism. Against this background, this text, then, marks an important epoch in the creation of Critical Security Studies as something other than an orientation towards the discipline, as well as effects conceptual exclusions that are the subject of contestation, not least by scholars at Aberystwyth University, who have considerable institutional claim to the Critical Security Studies label. In fact, the most aggressive attempt, somewhat ironic, to produce a coherent approach for critical security studies has been made from a position excluded mainly by the Copenhagen School's characterization of Critical Security Studies as being informed by constructivism and Poststructuralism.

At this juncture, the attempt has been focused on scholars based in Aberystwyth University (indeed, Steve Smith (2005) calls it the Welsh School), and has found its most complete expression to date in two recent volumes: *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (2005) and *Theory of World Security* (2007). Central to both books is the work of Ken Booth, who edited the first and wrote the second. Indeed, the theory of World Security is intended to be a definitive statement of Booth's thirty-year research program leading to a critical theory of security. (Booth 2007: pp. xvii-xviii).

Booth, in these texts, explicitly argued that not everyone who considers themselves to be working within Critical Security Studies will accept his orientation to a critical security theory. In fact, he argues that the formulation of a singular 'critical security theory' is the second stage of Critical Security work. Therefore, Booth's intervention is an unapologetic desire for fragmentation. Therefore, as he contended: "There are times when definite lines have to be drawn" (Booth 2005a: 260); rejecting the broad church in favor of a single tradition aimed at giving rise to a coherent theory of security, he distances himself sharply from Krause and Williams of Critical Security Studies.

Elaborating on a critical security theory in 2005, Booth followed his Aberystwyth colleague Richard Wyn Jones, who had drawn on the Frankfurt School tradition to think about security theory in his 1999 book *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory*.

Undoubtedly, both view the Frankfurt School tradition as essential to developing a critical theory for security studies. In *World Politics and Critical Security Studies*, Booth throws his net slightly wider than Frankfurt in identifying the tradition, adding Gramscian, Marxist, and Critical International Relations, with pride of place to the work of the Frankfurt School. Put differently, Booth drew on the range of post-Marxist social theory, particularly as it has been drawn into International Relations, with pride of place to the work of the Frankfurt School in general and Jürgen Habermas in particular.

With 2007's *Theory of World Security*, Booth's critical theory of Security was expanded. In this respect, he took an explicitly eclectic approach to theory building, engaging in *Perlenfischerie* (Pearl Fishing), following the term of Hannah Arendt. He drew from the post-Marxist oyster bed in 2005; his first set of pearls remains the same, and he is still with the Frankfurt School, the first among them. Thus, he adds a second, lesser set of ideas: world order, peace studies, feminism, historical sociology, and social idealism.

Yet, Ken Booth's antipathy to post-structural approaches to International Relations in general and security studies, in particular, manifests a common and virulent reaction. In addition to obscurantist, relativist, and faux radical approaches labeled post-structural have been called prolix and self-indulgent (Walt 1991) and accused of having no research program (Keohane 1988). Poststructuralists deny the form of foundations for knowledge claims that dominate the security studies debate. As can be imagined, this has led to much hostility toward post-structuralism... (S. Smith (2005: 49). As with its politics, the post-structural conception of critique is difficult for many to accept because, again, it is not straightforward. Nonetheless, it does not allow for finite claims and finished projects, and as students of society, we are trained to provide 'findings' and test them in a settled fashion.

In the same genre, neither Bradley Klein nor David Campbell, nor indeed several others, often also included in a post-structural security studies list, like James Der Derian, R.B.J. Walker, Cynthia Wæver, or even Michael, applies the label 'Critical Security Studies' to his work. All of them are surely and avowedly engaged in critical scholarship- fostering an ethos of critique- and much of their work is centrally concerned with security. For instance, Michael Dillon (1996) has written an extended political philosophy of security out of the tradition of French social theory, and his more recent work explores Foucault's notions of biopolitics in relation to the post-9/11 security strategies of the United States and other Western Powers (Dillon 2006; Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero 2008; Dillon and Neal 2008).

CONCLUSION

The issue of 'security' has taken on a greatly renewed significance since the Toronto conference of 1994; the Copenhagen School on Securitization Studies or distinctions; and the conceptual exclusions by scholars at Aberystwyth University, who have a considerable institutional claim to the Critical Security Label. Soviet American rivalry, during the Cold War, and the ever-present possibility of nuclear war aggravated an urgency to question security issues.

In the United States, after the events of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Security immediately regained its urgency. On the other hand, in the context of a war on terrorism, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, annual updates of anti-terror legislation, and other factors had led to the reorganization of government to provide 'homeland security, as well as issues of well-articulated and extraordinary measures on security'. In conclusion, therefore, in our present age, the issue of security is of paramount importance, and civilized states recognize it. Most states now encourage courses taught in Universities on Critical Security Studies and strategic know-how.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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