Ethnographic Contributions to Method Development

"Strong Objectivity" in Security Studies

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Article Abstract

This article shows that, contrary to common assumptions, there is much to be learned about methods from the constructivist/post-structuralist approaches to International Relations broadly speaking. It develops the point by unpacking the contributions of one specific method (ethnography) as used in one subfield of IR (Critical Security Studies). It shows that ethnographic research works with what Sandra Harding termed a "strong" understanding of objectivity. It shows that when this understanding is taken seriously, it must lead to a refashioning of the processes of gathering, analyzing and presenting data in ways that reverse many standard assumptions and instructions pertaining to "sound methods". Both in the contexts of observation and in that of justification, working with "strong objectivity" requires a flexibility and willingness to shift research strategy that is at odds with the usual emphasis on stringency, consistency and carefully planned research. It also requires accepting the engagement of the researcher with the researched is no regrettable inevitability but a potential to be used and mobilized. If these arguments were more widely acknowledged, it would be easier to justify/recognize the methodological foundations of research in the ethnographic tradition. However, it would also require rethinking standard methods instructions and the judgments they inform.

Article Keywords
Methodology, Critical Security, ethnography, Objectivity. Reflexivity

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Introduction

Approaches to security as well as the concepts of security tied to them have expanded considerably. Part and parcel of this expansion has been the consolidation of 'Critical Security Studies' (CSS) as integral to the 'mainstream' of Security Studies (for an overview and introduction, see Fierke, 2007). CSS is best characterized as a broad family of approaches that share a 'post-linguistic turn' approach to the study of international security. They take on board the significance of linguistic and narrative structures of text in producing (in)security (Buzan and Hansen, 2014: 25). They often extend their interest to include also the role of materiality and objects in these processes hence linking up with the new materialism in the social sciences (Srnicek, Fotou and Arghand, 2013).[2] As such, CSS has played a core role in placing issues pertaining to 'culture' in general, and security culture in particular, on the agenda of security studies (Williams, 2007). In the process, they have also been at the forefront of developing 'methodologies' for post-linguistically-informed studies in the realm of security (Ackerly, Stern, and True, 2006; Hansen, 2006 and Weber, 2006). However, while the contribution of CSS to enlarging, enriching and advancing the security studies agenda is widely acknowledged, its methodological contributions are far less so. The CSS 'campfire', as Sylvester (2013) puts it,

[2] For a programmatic discussion of this the Critical Security Project see C.A.S.E. Collective, 'Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto', *Security Dialogue* 37: 4, 2006. Obviously, the argument has no geographical limitation to Europe.

warms debates well beyond its inside circles but its methodologies are faint embers turning into ashes attractive to no one, not even the card-carrying, flag-waving members of the CSS group. From the outside, the consensus seems to be that CSS is methodologically underdeveloped, unclear and messy; and on the inside, methods questions are considered tedious relics from a positivistic past. In spite of a stream of publications on methods from the CSS camp expressly intent on breaking this consensus (see among many Aradau and Huysmans, 2013; Klotz and Depaak, 2008; Salter and Can, 2012; Shapiro, 2012), this image is 'sticky'. Hence scholars flirting with CSS ideas often prefer to dodge questions of method, and if forced to address them, often look outside the CSS camp.

This article focuses on one specific source of scepticism in regards to CSS method—the idea that it is not 'objective'—and tries to turn the tables by showing that, in reality, CSS scholars have a 'strong' understanding of objectivity (Harding, 1993: 18; Haraway, 1997: 37), which is a major contribution to methodological discussions about what it means to produce 'objective' research. The article develops this point drawing on arguments articulated in one specific CSS approach: the ethnographic. It proceeds in three steps: It begins by introducing the idea of 'strong objectivity' suggesting that it gains its strength (and is defined) by anchoring of objectivity in the nitty-gritty steps of research process itself; that is in method. The article then proceeds to show the implications of working with 'strong objectivity' in the context of observation when data is gathered and in the context of justification when it is presented. The article concludes that what is often interpreted as lack of 'objectivity' is, in fact, a reflection of a more robust understanding of what 'objectivity' is and what objectivity entails for methodological practice.

Understanding 'Strong Objectivity' through Ethnographic CSS Practice

Work in CSS often appears to violate one of the most elementary principles of research in the social sciences, namely the principle that science should strive to be objective. It commits a dual sin: terming scholarship 'feminist', 'post-colonial', 'engaged' or 'critical' explicitly flags the presence of values in the research aims and considering aesthetics, movies, literature, emotions, or music as possible research objects and possible forms of research communication confirms this presence. However, rather than a violation of the principles of 'objective' research, the visible presence of values in CSS reflects a more robust understanding and *practice* of objectivity in research.

This 'strong objectivity' is *not* anchored in the widely shared understanding that 'objectivity' is different from 'neutrality' and that the occasional presence of values may therefore be sign of strength (Haskell, 1998). For example, studying commercial security in Iraq leads to the conclusion that the costs have been enormous and the results far removed from what was desired or planned on virtually all accounts (SIGIR, 2013). Stating this objective conclusion is not neutral in its implications for the approach to commercial security in Iraq and beyond. The logic behind strong objectivity and its presence in CSS is different from this conventional distinction between the objective and the neutral.

What unites CSS is a post-linguistic approach to security. Despite its internal variety, CSS is therefore sensitive to the centrality of both meaning and materiality for the generation of (in)security. Consequently, it tends to focus on the processes and mechanisms of meaning production. Research is integral to this reproduction. Therefore, problematizing the observer-observation/observed link is quintessential to post-linguistic turn approaches (Guzzini, 2000; Pouliot, 2007; Hamati-Ataya, 2014). Objectivity in research can no longer be the view from

nowhere: All observation is embedded and embodied. This poses some quite serious challenges to the standard understanding of what objectivity in research means.

Most centrally, seeing research as embedded and embodied implies that objectivity can no longer be located in a space outside and above the researcher-researched relation, but inevitably has to be made part of it. Answering questions about objectivity therefore requires a more demanding (or strong) understanding of what objectivity entails. As Harding (1993: 18) formulates it in the context of capturing the role of science in reproducing race, 'a stronger, more adequate notion of objectivity would require methods for systematically examining all of the social values shaping a particular research process…'. Along similar lines, Pierre Bourdieu et al. (2005: 61) suggest that scholars striving to become more objective should reread Weber, pay attention to his distinction between axiological and epistemological value neutrality, and place more weight on the latter. As he puts it:

> The endless debate about axiological neutrality often replaces a discussion about epistemological neutrality of sociological techniques [...] through displacement, the interest in the ethical assumptions and values or ends, distracts the theory of sociological knowledge that is engaged in the most elementary sociological practice from critical examination.

The contribution of CSS scholars to better understandings of objectivity is precisely that they work with this 'stronger' understanding of objectivity and therefore explicitly and reflexively engage the values that are embedded in observation process itself (Leander, 2005; Hamati-Ataya, 2013).

CSS scholars are not alone in being aware of the 'epistemological side' of objectivity as expressed in elementary research practices. Space is devoted to it in most conventional

methodological discussion, including that of 'positivists'. For example, 'the KKV' methods book that long had a canonical status for mainstream International Relations (King Keohane and Verba, 1994), not only discusses the importance of the bias inhering in how the categories of observation are constructed and put into practice, but also insist on the import of making this explicit. They thus insist for example on the importance of what they term the 'back and forth' between theory and data allowing for the adjustment of theories and categories as well as on the importance of (reflexively) reporting the process of observation (p. 23) and acknowledging the uncertainty of the results (p. 31). However, not only is there a considerable gap between the positivist theory of science and mainstream security studies practice—usually less sensitive to the 'epistemological' sides of neutrality—there is little readiness to address the full implications for research methodologies of the embodied and embedded position of the researcher.

More specifically, two basic assumptions about what methods produce the most 'objective' research results are left unchallenged in most conventional methods discussions. The first assumption is that to produce objective results scholars should follow carefully defined, stringent, and relatively unchanging procedures. The second is that they should refrain from engaging personally, and especially emotionally, with their research object. The rationale of the assumption that *fixed research procedures* are desirable is that they guarantee that research becomes more than a mere reflection of the values and subjective interests of the researcher as these might change at a whim, with fashion or pressure from politics and funders. As KKV explain,

> 'it is extremely common to find that the best research design falls apart when the very
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> first observations are collected… Understanding from the outset what can and what

cannot be done at this later stage can help the researcher anticipate at least some of the problems when first designing the research.'(p. 13)

The rationale for *disengagement* in turn, is that it ensures that research is about the object of research rather than the researcher's own feelings and subjective opinions about it. The KKV, insists throughout that the research should be replicable (p.25) and unbiased (p. 27-28) both of which assume that the personality and emotional engagement in the researcher-researched relation is of little or no import. The weight of the two assumptions that research should follow relatively fixed procedures and be disengaged is palpable in the standard requirement that hypotheses informed by theories be operationalized so that they can inform the data selection in a research process where any visible (especially emotional) engagement by the researcher is suspicious.[3] Both assumptions are challenged by CSS scholars for reasons that will be explained with reference to arguments made by Ethnographers[4] working in CSS (ECSS).

In CSS, ethnographic approaches have become increasingly influential as scholars a diverse range of scholars have drawn upon them to study the 'mundane matters' (Enloe, 2011) that make up security across a range of contexts ranging from ministries (Neumann, 2012), border crossings (Amoore, 2013) and military organizations (Gusterson, 2003) to internet communities (Underberg, 2013) or academic practices of classification (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999). Even if these scholars may have their disciplinary home elsewhere than in security studies (for example in anthropology, media studies, or geography) and do not necessarily identify as

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[3] For both points see the instruction attached to the calls of research councils/funders relevant to the bulk of Security Studies, Przeworksi and Salomon's instructions on how to respond to these (1995) or general interdisciplinary methods instructions (Saunders et al., 2009).

[4] Ethnography in CSS is used here in the conventional sense of referring to research approaches focussing on: '…the study of people in naturally occurring settings or "fields" by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally' (Brewer, 2000: 6).

'ECSS'[5], there is a twofold reason for drawing on them for the sake of this discussion. One is that, across disciplinary boundaries, they discuss the link between objectivity and the epistemology embedded in 'elementary research practices' (e.g. Vrasti, 2008; Lie, 2013). The other is that focussing on one kind of methodology rather than trying to span the full spectrum of CSS approaches makes the argument clearer.

To make the methodological implications of strong objectivity visible, the article looks at how it fashions the two fundamental aspects of the research process: gathering data (in the context of observation) and presenting it (in the context of justification). The account below shows that precisely because they adopt a 'strong objectivity', ethnographers working in CSS have a diametrically opposite understanding of how to best enhance 'objectivity': they embrace flexible and even improvised procedures as well as personal and emotional researcher engagement both in the context of observation and the context of justification.

Data Gathering: Strong Objectivity in the Context of Observation

ECSS reverse prevailing ideas about objective research in their approach to gathering material—or 'data'—for analysis. Not only do they explicitly encourage flexibility in the process of data gathering, they also encourage researchers to draw on and deepen their personal engagement with the researched. Ethnographic approaches to CSS, follow other ethnographic researchers in their insistence on the 'symmetrical' character of knowledge (Brewer, 2000; Czarniawska, 2007; Latour, 2005). By this they mean to underline that scholarly knowledge is but one of many knowledge forms that are 'symmetrical' in the sense that they each have their own classificatory systems and ways of constituting social meaning. This recognition demands that research methodologies remain open to the possibility that unforeseen things may matter in unanticipated

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[5] This is a category I use to design ethnographic work in Critical Security Studies.

ways. As this section elaborates, such methodologies have to allow for—or more strongly—encourage non-fixed procedures and researcher engagement.

Non-Fixed Procedures Designed to Discover Multiple 'Morphologies'

'Consistent method is bad method.' (Miller, 2003: 77). This is an unusually stark and provocative articulation of ethnographic researchers' appreciation of non-fixed research procedures that make room for creativity and inventiveness in data gathering (e.g. Moeran, 2005). Underlying it, is a worry that if researchers stick to a scholastically predetermined understanding of how to go about gathering information, their work will not only to devalue forms of knowledge that fall outside this scope, but they may block themselves from understanding their research object. Fixity, in other words, introduces serious bias into the research practice. These points are straightforward when considered in practical research terms.

One reason overly strict procedures create biases is that they make it more difficult to capture and adjust to the unanticipated or unknown. When researchers set out to gather information they usually have clear ideas about what kind of things they are looking for and why. However, when they begin the research it may—in fact, usually does—turn out that other things are more informative, interesting and helpful for answering their questions than they thought at the outset. It may even turn out that the questions and hypothesis they started with were not the most fruitful or interesting. This experience is perhaps more common in ethnographic research than elsewhere precisely because it involves fieldwork. Indeed, part and parcel of the reason for doing ethnographies is to be able to take in the full repertoire of data (which may include spatial arrangements, pictures, body language, clothing and art forms)—to 'go native' enough to understand what counts to the 'tribe' and be able to decide which

questions, beyond those that were foreseen, are relevant. Higate (2011) probably did not anticipate the relevance of cat food (more specifically, the unspectacular, demeaning task of providing security for women shopping for cat food in Kabul) to the status of private security contractors doing security work in Afghanistan. This process of genuine learning at the heart of ethnographic method is made all but impossible if situations are approached as 'cases' of something else and read only through a strictly defined register of data (Kapferer, 2010). For ECSS, if the multiple and contextual nature of knowledge is to be respected, creativity in approaching data gathering and flexibility in adjusting the aims it serves shift status. They cease being unfortunate necessities. Flexibility and improvisation are necessary virtues.

The argument is taken further by the ECSS who insist that even more serious biases may be introduced as overly fixed procedures are often allowed to block research endeavours altogether. In many situations, it may be difficult to find the kind of data and answer the kinds of questions envisaged by conventional methods instructions and theories. Faced with this difficulty, scholars with a fixed approach to data gathering tend to abandon their research focus, and hence many of the most important issues in security studies (for example, those involving gender, intelligence services or organized crime). ECSS, by contrast, would then take a more pragmatic approach and 'construct their research object on the basis of information available' (Bourdieu et al., 2005: 193 ff.).

In her work on global outlaws, Nordstrom (1997: 37-44) for example, retraces the role of the Angolan military among global outlaws (about which there is little 'hard data') in the production of global outlaws by talking to taxi-drivers, NGO workers and businessmen. More than this, flexibility regarding data may require moving away from fieldwork as it is conventionally understood. Hence, biographies (Higate, 2012; Czarniawska, 1999), photographs

or films from surveillance cameras (Collins, 2008), web-marketing (Schneiker and Joachim, 2012; Leander, 2013) or information compiled by journalists may prove to be useful ways of accessing 'tribes' that do not welcome foreigners or live a virtual or multi-sited life (Stroschein, 2012; Leander, 2014). In fact, ECSS will happily mix heterogeneous sources, following them as they become available, oblivious of whether they are the sources fixed as the 'right' ones in the original research design or whether they are suitable for the operationalization of the theoretical questions that may indeed themselves be involved in the process. In doing so, they are behaving in accordance with the established ethnographic canon, in which 'even the most rationalist ethnographer is perfectly capable of bringing together in a single monograph the myths, ethnosciences, genealogies, political forms, techniques, religions, epics and rites of the people she is studying' to convey a put-together understanding of the processes under study (Latour, 1993: 7). This obviously demands flexibility.

The first insight ECSS brings to security studies about 'objective' research practices is, in other words, that contrary to the assumption that objectivity requires fixed procedures for gathering data, it demands flexibility or even improvisation. Flexibility is equally important for scholars 'studying up', that is looking at the privileged powerful who have the resources and power to block information and access (Lie 2013) and for scholars studying the radically different or marginalized about whom equally little conventional data is available (Tickner, 2013: 225). More than this, flexibility is the only way of avoiding the scholastic hubris entailed in assuming that it is possible to know what data is most useful for understanding a context and what questions should be asked of it *before* that context has been studied (for an elaboration of this point see Bourdieu, 2012: 463). It is also a necessity if the door on unconventional questions and inquiries based on unconventional knowledge forms is to remain open. Flexibility in data

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gathering is, in other words, not something ethnographers think of as a regrettable practical necessity imposed by the circumstances of their work, but rather as a precondition for objective research capable of respecting different forms of knowledge.

Researcher Engagement: The Researcher as a 'Midwife'

For analogous reasons, ECSS consider their visible engagement (including their emotional engagement) with the researched a virtue that strengthens the objectivity of their research rather than something to be hidden away. Being a 'fly on the wall' is a practical impossibility for most fieldwork (besides being a strange thing to aspire to generally). ECSS can no more become invisible outsiders or native insiders when they research the tribes of contemporary diplomacy, military or border agencies than could Evans Pritchard when he researched the Zande. Even if the world of security contractors includes women and academics, and even if I do my best to adopt some of their style, I will always be an identifiable outsider. This is the fate of ECSS. But ECSS see engagement as enhancing rather than hampering the objectivity of research. Engagement is a source of less biased information both because engagement can be used to obtain better information and because the emotions that arise through engagement are an important source of information in their own right.

The idea of drawing on researcher engagement to shape information into something more objective is less outlandish than it appears. The observed (diplomats, security contractors, etc.) change their behaviour and the information they are willing to provide when a researcher is present (e.g. French, 1950). Analogously, observers will necessarily retain different information depending on the embedded/embodied position they observe from; depending on 'their positionality' in relation to the researched (Tickner, 2013: 225). The engagement of white,

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female, feminist researchers with fieldwork about soldiering in the DRC will predictably produce different results than the engagement of a black, male, military official would. They can, for example, bring out the complex negotiation of identities among female soldiers that might otherwise be overlooked (Ericsson Baaz and Stern, 2013). Engagement, clearly, fashions which data is (and can be) gathered in fieldwork. To ignore this would introduce tremendous bias in the research. Of course, ECSS would insist that this bias is not specific to fieldwork. It is omnipresent in research. The difference is that in fieldwork it cannot be ignored. There is no space of transcendent knowledge to which researchers can escape to create the illusion that they are 'objective'. Doing fieldwork, they are inescapably situated as researchers in the 'field' they observe.

ECSS therefore follows the well-trodden paths of ethnographers, who turn their inevitable engagement into something bolstering objectivity. They explicitly reflect on the implications of engagement—they are 'reflexive' at all stages of the research process (Leander, 2005; Rask-Madsen, 2011; Hamati-Ataya, 2013). Consequently, they can compensate for the effects of engagement by, for example, involving others in the research or using their engagement to push or help the observed to provide information that the researcher would not otherwise have access to and that the observed could not have articulated themselves. As Bourdieu, ECSS would find it quite logical that 'like a midwife' they can assist the observed in the work of bringing to light things deeply buried (Bourdieu, 1999: 621). This conscious 'massaging' (critics would say manipulation) of 'data' would not be viewed as diminishing objectivity. On the contrary, ECSS would view it as part of the more general effort of consciously strengthening objectivity. ECSS deal with the consequences of engagement instead

of allowing the delusion of a space in which engagement has no consequences to bias research and diminishes its objectivity.

A similar logic pertains to the way ethnographers see the role of emotions. Instead of wishing emotions away, which amounts to allowing their role to remain unaccounted for, ECSS have made considerable efforts to include emotions as key to the process of gathering information. This is true in the sense that they have taken an interest in the role emotions play in the social world, and hence in how to document emotions (e.g. Crawford, 2014; Bleiker and Hutchinson, 2008; Hutchinson and Bleiker, 2014; Fierke, 2013). But more centrally for the discussion here, they have opened up the idea that the emotional engagement of the researcher may be an important source of data in its own right (e.g. Sylvester, 2012; Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006). This is a logical conclusion of accepting knowledge as symmetrical. If the observed are often guided by their emotions in how they apprehend the world, there is no a priori reason to assume that researchers should not also be. The relevant question turns into not *if* but *how* to deal with emotions in research.

Textbooks in ethnographic methods therefore instruct researchers to be careful in acknowledging their emotions. However, their own unease, closeness or friendships can provide them with essential information, not only about how the context they are researching works, but also about their own ability to understand that context (Bourdieu, 1999: 614). In many cases this will lead to shifts in research focus. As a scholar working on the military explains: 'I went into my research trying to learn about war, but the soldiers I interacted with taught me more about manhood than about combat' (Crane-Seeber, 2012). In other cases, emotions make research extremely difficult. Acknowledging this may be a far better research strategy than persisting to ignore it, an approach that is more likely to produce nervous breakdowns than books or PhDs

(Czarniawska, 2007). For ECSS, this explicit and visible presence of emotions in the research process is consequently not something that signals a deficient understanding of objectivity. On the contrary, it is a pre-condition for strengthening objectivity. Only by acknowledging and explicating the role of emotions is it possible to account for their role in the production of knowledge.

Highlighting the importance of making the researcher's personal and emotional engagement in data gathering visible and explicit for objective research practices is ECSS's second contribution to discussions about objective research methods. The first was their insistence that prior to research work, research methods needed to be flexible and evolving, rather than fixed. This reverses standard precepts that one should carefully delineate the relevant questions prior to engaging research, gather data according to the criteria delineated in the operationalization of the hypothesis and then avoid (to the extent possible) personal, and especially emotional, engagement with the researched. Strong objectivity from ECSS perspective rests on a flexible, creative, improvising, personally and emotionally engaged approach to the context of research.

Data presentation: Strong Objectivity in the Context of Justification

Their strong approach to objectivity also fashions how ECSS view what is entailed in objective presentations of research results—how they think researchers should communicate in the context of justification when they are presenting and justifying their result to others. For them, objectivity is weakened, not enhanced, by a 'reporting' of results in a standardized scientific format, where the only trace of the researcher is in the invisible anonymous voice of the account. This form of relation to the context of justification may be (or rather, often is) effective in

constructing scientific authority. However, it undermines, rather than sustains, objectivity. From an ECSS perspective, objectivity is far better served by flexible forms and formats of data presentation which make it possible to communicate multiple and contradictory meanings. These, and a visible (personal and emotional) researcher engagement, are necessary if research communication is to do more than reproduce the profoundly biased and power-laden assumption that academia is a world apart which sees and understands everything without impacting anything.

Non-Fixed Procedures Conveying Multiple, Contradictory Meanings

Ethnographers are concerned with a communication of the researched which is not distorted or overshadowed by academic and theoretical interest. They wish to limit the 'risk' or 'violence' of writing which often force the multiple, contradictory meanings of the observed into a straightjacket of academic research (Bourdieu, 1999: 622). By avoiding this, they wish to provide an objective (as in Haraway's strong sense) account of the observed. Following the fixed, standardized procedures for how academic research should be related to the context of justification hampers this aim in two ways.

One is that the standard formats involve *criteria* for selecting valid knowledges, epitomized by references to relevance, validity, reliability, and generalizability inherent to the format of scientific writing. Hence, communication from outside the academic discourse becomes exceedingly difficult. Research is always for someone as Cox (1981) insisted. That someone is first and foremost another academic (although this of course is not what Cox had in mind). The force of this is palpable in the tremor most students, including those well-versed in ethnography, feel when they rely on the knowledge of their respondents or on their own

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observations, which therefore often end up relegated to the annexe. But it is also the fate of those trying to introduce new kinds of knowledge. Early feminist thinking in security studies is exemplary in this regard. The reaction to it was invariably: Why is it relevant? Why should it be trusted? When will it engage 'empirical' research of the kind we recognize as relevant? (Keohane, 1989). The efforts of scholars such as Ann Tickner (2005) or Cynthia Enloe (1990, 1994, 2000, 2007) to formulate arguments that answered these questions were therefore of crucial importance in reforming and altering the fixed standardized format of research communication in security studies. With her effective titles Enloe refashioned the debate by 'diffracting' the understanding of security. However, she did this *against* the fixed and standardized criteria, and could *only* do so because of her uncommonly eloquent academic voice. As Tickner, she was well-versed in security studies and international relations and able to twist its criteria to allow for a gendered language. The trouble with standard formats of research presentation is precisely that they tend to exclude the knowledges of those who do not share Enloe's capacity to subvert the power of academia from within. This is hardly an objective way of dealing with knowledge, but a highly subjective one, strongly biased towards academic knowledge.

The other, related reason the fixed conventions of academic research presentation often make it exceedingly difficult to communicate multiple knowledge is the restrictions imposed on the form of communication. The data of ethnographic research is a heterogeneous mixture that may involve things like speech, observation, images, sounds, emotions, and smells. Presenting this data is therefore also often best done in forms unconventional for academia. Some scholars write on parallel pages so that the voice of the observed can be heard on one side (e.g. the even pages), while the academic and theoretical texts runs uninterruptedly on the other (e.g. the odd

pages). Other scholars rely on images, extracts from web-conversations, film making, theatre or

novels for the communication of their ideas. Even if these formats have made their way into the

standard fora of academic international relations, as demonstrated by their presence in textbooks

(Weber, 2006) on the program of the International Studies Association Convention (Hozic, 2013;

Edkins, 2013) or the emergence of new publications such as the *Journal of Narrative Politics*,

they are still alien formats to most security studies journals,[6] who hesitate to publish them. The

consequence of this is that ECSS scholars find themselves in a situation of presenting their

research results without directly including their 'data'. An analogous situation would be the

quantitative researcher having to communicate research without including the numbers on which

their conclusions were based. This partial form of communication can hardly be said to favour

objectivity. Nor, of course, does the more general exclusion of essential forms of data.

When ECSS depart from the fixed criteria and strictures of academic writing and instead

resort to long direct quotes, photographic images, film, poetry or music, it is in other words *not*

because they fail to understand objectivity. It is precisely because they have a more solid

understanding of what objective presentation of research data entails. To not be biased against

(or make impossible) the capturing of a multiplicity of knowledges beyond the scholarly

scientific community requires a more flexible understanding of what the criteria for valid

knowledge are and what forms of presentation that make it possible to convey these research

results.

Researcher Engagement in Selective Translations

A concern with improving objectivity also informs the ECSS' tendency to positively value the

personal and emotional engagement of the researcher in the process of presenting results. For

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[6] Obvious exceptions include *Alternatives*, *International Political Sociology*, and *Security Dialogue.*

ethnographers, the presentation of the research results can never be a matter of 'reporting'. The material will always be too large and complex for this to be an even remotely realistic option. Even when space for rendering the multiplicity and contradictions of the social world is created, the researcher has to decide which aspects to include in/exclude from the account. Moreover, in the process of making the account, they are in fact creating the research object as it will be rendered to the context of justification. Researchers, in other words, make choices about how they want to translate their 'data' and communicate knowledge. The subtle mechanisms and biases involved in this selection are entirely missed by those who focus only on the accuracy of the account (Baker, 2010). Viewed from an ECSS angle, unengaged reporting is therefore not an option. At best, it is a fig-leaf covering unreflected choices and the associated biases. Aspiring to objectivity in the research process therefore demands that the researcher's personal and emotional engagement be made visible.

One of the clearest expressions of the importance attached to personal engagement by ECSS is their insistence that researchers are responsible for (and should be explicit about) how and to whom they decide to translate their research. The standard assumption is that unless the observed specifically requests that information about them be kept confidential, including it is acceptable. This is insufficient from an ECSS perspective. It is the responsibility of the researcher to reflect on the implications of their research findings for the researched (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995). Such reflections may lead to the conclusion that information should not be included even if the observed did not explicitly ask for it to be excluded or, inversely, that it would be irresponsible not to include it simply because someone requested it be excluded. In war or conflict situations, such as those dealt with by Nordstrom, the stakes are high. Even when the stakes are lower, ethnographers find it important to demonstrate that they are engaged enough to

make informed choices about how and what to translate from their research. The consequence is sophisticated discussions about what kind of data gathering is 'ethical' that includes sharp criticism of the reliance on generalized and abstract ethic codes (Schrag, 2010; Zehfuss, 2012). This visible, and preferably explicitly reflected-upon, engagement of the researcher in the presentation of research results does not hamper objectivity. It is a necessity if research is not to be biased against, or possibly lead to the physical endangerment of, the observed.

For analogous reasons, the emotional engagement of the researcher in research presentation is considered to bolster objectivity by ECSS. One reason is that emotions often play a core role in motivating research. Hence, being explicit and reflexive about both their presence in framing research (as civic anger fashions critical research, Silber, 2011) and the research process (Pupavac, 2004) is important for an 'objective' rendering of the research results. However, equally important is the fact that a visible presence of emotions enhances the presentation of research results. It makes them graspable, tangible and more interesting. Some ECSS would no doubt side with Bourdieu (1999: 614), who insists that without engagement and emotion one might as well give up on the idea of communicating an understanding of the observed. Sylvester (2011, 2013), for example, has repeatedly insisted that including the emotional register and making IR less abstract is essential to improving the quality of communication in the discipline. Sylvester's arguments are focused on the potential for capturing a diversity of knowledges that the emotional register opens. The implication of this view is that drawing on emotions has the potential to strengthen the objectivity of communication about International Relations research. In other words, for ECSS 'engagement', including emotional engagement is a necessary and valuable part of the presentation of research results.

Acknowledging this is necessary in order to avoid unaccounted biases. For ECSS, emotional engagement helps (rather than hinders) the objectivity of research.

In their approach to the presentation of data, just as in the processes of gathering and analysing it, ECSS insist on a research practice in which procedures are flexible and the researcher is engaged, including emotionally, with the researched. As previously emphasized, the reason is not a disregard for objectivity, but a wish to enhance it. Flexible procedures are necessary in order to not exclude or bias data presentation against specific kinds and sources of information, and engagement is integral to the process of selectively translating a context.

Conclusion

This article has insisted that Critical Security Studies (CSS) has not only 'enlarged the concept' of security, but also contributed to methodological discussions. The article focused on one such contribution, namely the contribution of CSS to discussions about what 'objectivity' means. Following the research of Ethnographers working in CSS (ECSS) in the contexts of observation and justification, the article traced their contributions to understanding objectivity. It suggested that they work with a robust notion of objectivity, which makes flexibility and emotional engagement essential. The article also highlighted that, in doing so, ethnographers challenge standard understandings of objectivity as being enhanced by fixed procedures and disengaged researchers. The article began pointing out that this 'strong objectivity' has roots in the acknowledgement that research is an embedded and embodied activity and that questions of objectivity therefore have to be raised even in relation to the most mundane sides of research practice. This may seem to make references to objectivity entirely inappropriate. Don't ECSS 'dodge' questions of 'objectivity' altogether? They may not like the term much, but they are

certainly not avoiding these questions. ECSS (and CSS more generally) are not suggesting that 'anything goes' in terms of objectivity. On the contrary, they are trying to contribute a more sophisticated understanding of what is involved in being 'objective'. Haraway's answer to the 'don't they dodge the question of objectivity' question (posed to feminist philosophies of sciences) is pertinent also here: 'All that … strong objectivity "dodge[s]" is the double faced, self-identical god of transcendent culture of no culture, on the one hand, and of subjects and objects exempt from the permanent finitude of engaged interpretation on the other.' (Haraway, 1997: 37).

This argument about objectivity has been advanced drawing upon ethnographic work in CSS. However, the argument is of more general relevance. Bias and values are embedded in the elementary practices of other forms of research; conventional 'positivist' forms as well as other forms of CSS research (including those drawing on history, political theory or actor-network theory[7]). This is easily forgotten. The field cannot 'strike back' on scholars who do not do field work. The 'elementary research practices' can therefore more easily be hidden from view behind walls of 'ostentatious scientificity' or 'obscurantist radicalism' that make us forget their bias (Bourdieu, 2012: 222). However, forgetting or ignoring the bias does not diminish the relevance of the issues raised by ECSS in regards to objectivity, even if it facilitates the more comfortable 'business as usual' research. Indeed, if taken seriously, the insights of ECSS about objective methods are uncomfortable precisely because they would demand a rethinking of standardized assumptions about good methodological practice. This would involve reconsidering the instructions conveyed by methodological authorities on every level, from student instructors to journal editors and research councils. But discomfort is often a good thing. In this case, it could

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[7] Haraway is aiming her statement in both directions. It is formulated as part of a critique of Latour and work in actor-network theory more generally.

be an opportunity to improve the 'business as usual' research practices in security studies by

making a stronger objectivity integral to it. This is the challenge and contribution the work of

ECSS offers security studies.

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