FOLLOW

Translating STS to Security Sites

Central Library, Haarlem

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European Research Council
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Universiteit van Amsterdam

Workshop Objectives

An increasing number of scholars in Critical Security Studies is taking up concepts, themes and methods broadly associated with Science-and-Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). These approaches help us grasp the socio-material fabric of international politics. They have increasingly proved inspirational for research focusing on security practices. This includes vibrant analyses of – for example – the political controversies surrounding security operations;[1] the material-becoming of weaponry deemed to be legally acceptable[2]; and the space of the border as a site of socio-technical experimentation.[3] These and other works are inspired by the ways in which STS-type approaches "[attend] to multiplicity" and offer new "conceptualizations of what it might be to *hold together*"[4] (Law and Mol 2002: 10). They explore power as continuously in the making.

STS approaches ask, as Nisha Shah has put it, 'how matter comes to matter' in relation to practices of warfare, weaponry, violence and securing.[5] They appropriate, deploy and develop concepts like, controversies, chains of reference, symmetry, translation, mediation and classification, to new ends. They offer novel approaches to thinking security *politics*, for example by analyzing how human and nonhuman actors are enrolled and associated to normalize or to contest particular political projects or security technologies,[6] and how publics re constituted around security practices.[7]

This fruitful redeployment of STS concepts and tools to sites of security, however, also raises considerable questions. How do we *translate* STS to be useful in new domains? What are the stakes and challenges when we bring insights drawn from STS to bear on the study of security sites? How can we retrace continuities *and* discontinuities between security and other practices, thus fostering and broadening the conversation with STS? How can we redefine and rethink the conceptual terminologies of STS to make them attuned to researching controversies in de-bounded, secretive, and profoundly political environments?[8]

In short, what gets lost, added and altered when – so to speak – we take 'Latour far from a Laboratory,' 'Mol out of the Hospital,' 'Stengers away from Science' or 'Haraway without her Kindred Critters'?

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[1] Schouten P. (2014) Security as Controversy: Reassembling security at Amsterdam Airport. *Security Dialogue* 45(1): 23-42.
[2] Shah N. (2017) Gunning for War: Infantry rifles and the calibration of lethal force. *Critical Studies on Security* 5(1): 81-104.
[3] Bourne M, Johnson H and Lisle D. (2015) Laboratizing the Border: The production, translation and anticipation of security technologies. *Security Dialogue* 46(4): 307-325.
[4] Law, J. & Mol. A (2002). *Complexities: Social studies of knowledge practices*. Duke University Press, p. 10.
[5] Shah *op. cit.*: p. 3. Aradau C. (2010) Security That Matters: Critical infrastructure and objects of protection. *Security Dialogue* 41(5): 491-514.
[5] Bellanova R and González Fuster G. (2013) Politics of Disappearance: Scanners and (unobserved) bodies as mediators o
[6] Bellanova R and González Fuster G. (2013) Politics of Disappearance: Scanners and (unobserved) bodies as mediators of security practices. *International Political Sociology* 7(2): 188-209; Jeandesboz J. (2016) Smartening Border Security in the European Union: An associational inquiry. *Security Dialogue* 47(4): 292-309.
[7] Walters W. (2014) Drone Strikes, Dingpolitik and Beyond. *Security Dialogue* 45(2): 101-18.
[8] The discussion on this has started in i.a.: Best J and Walters W. (2013) "Actor-Network Theory" and International Relationality: Lost (and found) in translation. Introduction. *International Political Sociology* 7(3): 332-334; and Barry A. (2013) The Translation Zone: Between Actor-Network Theory and International Relations. *Millennium* 41(3): 413-429; Salter MB. (ed.) (2015) *Making Things International 1*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; and Walters W and Salter MB (2016) Bruno Latour Encounters International Relations: An Interview. *Millennium* 44(3): 524-546.

The workshop has a dual objective:

First, to assess, discuss and analyse the specific challenges in STS-inspired security research. What happens to the tools and concepts of STS when they are translated from the laboratory to the sensitive and secretive security field? How can symmetrical approaches be deployed when access to (in)security sites and actors may be restrained? What are the political stakes and which kind of critique can STS-inspired security research bring forward?

Second, to exchange best-practice examples and foster a dialogue on research practice. What specific methodological questions are central in STS-driven security research? What methodological choices and dilemmas might we encounter when translating STS to security research, and how can we deal with them? The workshop will invite senior researchers to share examples and best- or worst-practice experiences from their own previous research.

Translating STS to Security Sites is organized by Tasniem Anwar (MSc/LLM), Dr Rocco Bellanova and Prof. Marieke de Goede, as part of ERC Consolidator Grant project FOLLOW: Following the Money from Transaction to Trial (CoG—682317). For more information, see www.projectfollow.org

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Translating STS to Security Sites

Workshop Program

Monday June 25| Haarlem, Central Library | Doelenzaal

09.30-10.00: *Coffee & Welcome*

10.00-11.00: **The Meaning of Death: In Search of the Militarily Acceptable Wound** [lecture 1]

Nisha Shah (University of Ottawa). Moderator: ***Esmé Bosma*** (University of Amsterdam)

11.00-12.30: **The Universal and the Particular** [panel 1]

Kai Koddenbrock (University of Duisburg-Essen), ***Anna Leander*** (Copenhagen Business School), ***Jef Huysmans*** (Queen Mary University). Moderator: ***Marieke de Goede*** (University of Amsterdam)

12.30-13.30: *Lunch*

13.30-14.30: **The Art of Paying Attention** [lecture 2]

Amade M'charek (University of Amsterdam). Moderator: ***Victor Toom*** (Goethe University)

14.30-15.00: *Coffee break*

15.00-16.00: **Becoming (of) Data** [panel 2]

Ute Tellmann (Universität Erfurt). Moderator: ***Rocco Bellanova*** (University of Amsterdam)

16.00-17.15: **Follow the secret: Secrecy, security, and STS** [lecture 3]

William Walters (Carleton University). Moderator: ***Huub Dijstelbloem*** (University of Amsterdam)

17.15 – 19.00 *Drinks and Snacks at Library*

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Lecture abstracts

Follow the secret: Secrecy, security and STS

State secrecy is often imagined as special information that is being concealed, veiled, and held by a group of insiders from the rest, the outsiders. This is what I call the commonplace secrecy imagination. This paper looks to provide a more dynamic and decentred account of secrecy in which themes of dispersion, translation, and ambiguity are given more weight. Building on STS and recent security research the paper argues we should follow the secret, and orient ourselves to secrecy in the making. This means looking at the dynamics of concealment and revelation that occur in multiple settings when secret information is shared and used within security projects. It means attending to the containers and materials which mediate secrecy once it is understood as information control. The paper demonstrates the potential of following the secret by connecting these ideas to a historical case study. It looks at what historians now call VENONA: an early SIGINT project which is credited with uncovering Soviet spy rings that were embedded within intelligence and research organizations of the US and its allies during the Cold War. In making this move the paper also makes the case that the revival of interest in secrecy amongst security researchers should not confine its attention to contemporary policies and controversies. There is also much to be learnt by engaging historical cases which have, to date, been the sole preserve of mainstream historians of intelligence.

The Meaning of Death: In Search of the Militarily Acceptable Wound

Observations from Crimean and US Civil Wars remarked that more 'disastrous' wounds were marking the battlefield. The response was the birth of new techniques around trauma care and triage. Less well considered has been the development of wound ballistics, the study of the effects of weaponry on the body. Important for medical surgeons wishing to enhance treatment, equal effort was directed to devising experiments to test and maximize the 'stopping power' of weaponry. Focusing on early experimental testing and battle casualty surveys focused on the rapid development of the rifle's conical bullets, I explore the search for the 'militarily acceptable wound'. I argue that killing in and itself was an insufficient as a measure of death in war. Rather, killing had to be *calibrated* in specific ways. Death as a result came to have certain meanings: the type of wounds from particular rifles and bullets indicated not just how crossing the line from life to death was possible but permissible, a 'convention' of modern war. Transforming wounds from medical specimens into the materiel of war, I situate wounding as 'martial tactic' in which dead bodies are more than consequences but come to shape weapons. Overall, I contend that bullets and dead bodies together make up an ethical infrastructure through which certain deadly weapons become desirable.

Panel descriptions

The Universal and the Particular [panel 1]

Translating STS to studying security restages the dialogue between the universal and the particular. Where security studies (and International Relations more broadly) are practiced in analyzing the big structures of globalization, power and inequality, the strength of STS is in its attentiveness to concrete sites and everyday mundane and minute practices. The encounter between security studies and STS is situated precisely within the complex, multiple and situated interconnections between the 'big' of global politics, and the 'small' of individual lives, case studies narratives and technical details. This panel moves the discussion beyond the binary. It asks how bringing STS to security helps research traffic between the universal and the particular in a productive and critical way, that is respectful of empirical detail without crowing out questions of domination. This may include, for example, (1) a focus on practice, including mundane routines and little technicalities that are no longer understood as mere details, but that are granted constitutive power; (2) an attentiveness to temporality by emphasizing the shifting and the mobile over the ordered and the continuous. The colonial histories of political technologies and knowledge practices comes to the fore here. Together, we can reflect on how to approach Stengers' task of "accepting an adventure from which none of the words that serve as our reference points should emerge unscathed, but from which none will be disqualified or denounced as an illusion."

Becoming [of] Data [panel 2]

Data partake in many security practices. They translate people, things and events into information that can be collected, stored and computed. Data and data analytics promise to security actors the possibility to produce actionable knowledge, and to govern at a temporal and spatial distance. Critical security scholars have been among the first to study data-driven security measures and their political rationalities. Focusing on data analytics, they have questioned the forms of knowledge that underpin data-led practices, and they have investigated the institutional relations that organize socio-technical assemblages. In conversation with STS and media studies, some CSS researchers have recently problematized the very notion of data as something merely given, highlighting their co-constructed and often situated nature. Interrogating diverse becomings (of) data, this panel proposes three analytical moves to sharpen our understanding of security practice. First, it suggests retracing the manifold translations that mark the political, technical and legal lives of data, focusing on the processes of *becoming data*. Second, it discusses how to better follow data as security actants, how they come to inform security practices, how the *becoming of specific data-sets* matters. Finally, the panel invites to explore the *historical becoming of data.* This permits to appreciate the continuities and discontinuities between big data or machine learning algorithms and other knowledge devices used for governing society.

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about FOLLOW

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Summary: Increasingly, private companies find themselves in the 'frontline' of fighting terrorism and other security threats. Companies do not just *cooperate with* security authorities, but actively come to play a part in security practices. Companies identify, select, search, interpret suspicious transactions. They monitor, regulate, restrict and expel client groups. These developments change the nature of security, no longer purely the domain of state sovereignty. Financial warfare positions banks and financial institutions in the frontline of security practice and fighting terrorism. These security practices can have important implications for everyone with a bank account – yet remain largely invisible.

Aims and objectives: FOLLOW studies the path of the suspicious financial transaction across private and public spheres. It follows the 'chain of translation' whereby a transaction is rendered from bank registration to suspicious transaction to court evidence. We analyse how knowledge about suspicious financial transactions is formed by banks, national Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) and courts. At each link in the chain, we study the challenges of privacy and the (unintended) side-effects. FOLLOW asks: what gets lost and added in the process of translating financial transactions? How does financial warfare lead to financial data profiles; influential typologies of vulnerable sectors; and case law on terrorism facilitation?

Approach: Though the policy programmes of countering terrorism financing have been analysed quite extensively, very little is known about the ways in which these take shape *in practice*. At each link in the security chain, a financial transaction does not just change in institutional context, but it changes in meaning. FOLLOW is interested in the daily practices and complex dilemmas of compliance professionals within banks and other private companies. We study the ways in which companies cooperate with compliance authorities and law enforcement, and the challenges that arise here. We use participant observation coupled with in-depth semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the practices and dilemmas of professionals.

About us:

- **Prof. dr. Marieke de Goede**: Principal investigator (PI), with a long-standing research interest in terrorism financing and preemptive security;
- **Dr. Rocco Bellanova**: Post-doctoral researcher, EU privacy expert, focusing on courts;
- **Dr. Polly Pallister-Wilkins**: Associate professor, research on border security practices;
- **Dr. Beste Isleyen**: Associate professor, research on EU politics & border security practices;
- **MSc Esmé Bosma**: PhD candidate, research on security practices in/surrounding banks;
- **MSc, LLM Tasniem Anwar**: PhD candidate, research on the court room and legal knowledge ;
- **MSc Pieter Lagerwaard**: PhD candidate, research on the security judgements of FIUs.

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