

Making Security Public: Scandals, Controversies, Struggles

Workshop Organisers: Claudia Aradau (King's College London) & Georgios Glouftisios (University of Trento)

Unregistered border deaths, covered-up police violence, nonrecording of data, classified counter-terrorism programmes, secretive targeted killings, as well as obscure surveillance and intelligence gathering infrastructures are only some of the forms that security takes today. Although security is practiced virtually everywhere, its form, consequences and inner workings are elusive, uncertain, concealed or foggy. We know about the existence of security's dirty secrets, without however knowing their precise content and meaning (Birchall, 2021; Walters, 2021). It often takes the persistent efforts of investigative journalists, activists and academics to make these practices public and open new scenes of contestation. This workshop proposes to explore modes of making security public. More specifically, we invite theoretical and methodological engagements with scandals, controversies and struggles over rendering the violence of security practices visible and contestable. We understand security in broad terms as relating, among others, to warfare, policing, surveillance, as well as borders and migration management.

Controversy-oriented research has emerged within the transdisciplinary field of Science Technology Studies (STS) where scholars have been studying the development and closure of technoscientific disputes, the variegated processes through which scientific "facts" come to be accepted or rejected, and the multiple frictions arising in the process of building technological devices and large-scale infrastructures (e.g., Barry, 2001; Bijker and Law, 1992; Venturini and Munk, 2022). In critical security studies, scholars have explored how matters of care and concern emerge over security practices, how public inquiries and court hearings allow researchers to better understand how security is contested (e.g., Anwar, 2020; Gros, De Goede and İşleyen, 2017; Ingram, 2019; Walters, 2014). They have also attended to how sociotechnical controversies bring together policy makers, legislators, public authorities and private contractors (e.g., Côté-Boucher, 2020; Glouftisios, 2021; Monsees, 2019; Schouten, 2014). Scandals (and related concepts of disputes and affairs) have been discussed in pragmatic sociology (de Blic and Lemieux 2005, Boltanski and Claverie 2007), but until recently have attracted less attention in international relations (but see Aradau and Mc Cluskey 2022; Johnson, Basham and Thomas 2022). Struggles have informed critical analyses of power and knowledge, in close relation to resistance and counter-conduct. Starting from struggle has also been proposed as a methodological intervention for critical security studies to make sense of 'less-visible violences to which they testify' (Coleman and Rosenow 2016).

We propose to further this research agenda by inviting attention to scandals, controversies and struggles as methodological interventions to make security public. Engaging with scandals, controversies and struggles is a way to observe security politics in action, in the sense that it allows researchers to follow disputes relevant to security as they unfold in public forums and gather empirical material that would be otherwise difficult to access. Scandals, controversies and struggles involve a multiplicity of actors who often expose, debate and disseminate information about security to the wider public (e.g., oversight bodies, field experts, investigative journalists). We also want to reflect upon how we, as scholars, can engage in security politics through interventions that feed into struggles over rendering security's violence and injustices visible.