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**Sociologies of (In)security**

for Philippe Bourbeau, ed., *Security: Dialogue Across Disciplines*

1. *Introduction*

In contrast to other disciplines, "security" has not traditionally been a central focus of sociological research.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that sociologists have not studied problems, sites, interactions, and discourses that are relevant to what has elsewhere been classified as security.<sup>2</sup> But sociologists have tended not to conceptualize their work as such.<sup>3</sup> Over the last 15 years, however, this inattention to security has begun to shift, and sociologists have increasingly begun to frame their work around the concept. This has included those who study the terrains of security as it is understood in other disciplines—the realms of states, warfare, and political violence. But it has also included sociologists at the core of the discipline who research its traditional concerns of economic inequality, the family, and other social institutions.

The study of security within sociology is thus bifurcated, with a small but robust tradition studying what we will call here *political* security in dialogue with other disciplines. Following Hobbes, scholars of political science and international relations focus on security as the key

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<sup>1</sup> The situation in sociology resembles that of anthropology: "While other disciplines have dedicated journals, programs of study, and entire schools of thought to the security "problem," anthropology has largely refrained from joining the conversation, even as other global phenomena (e.g. human rights) have been prominent foci of anthropological scrutiny" (Goldstein 2010:488).

<sup>2</sup> There are also works by non-sociologists that have been highly influenced by sociological approaches. For example, recent attempts to incorporate practice theory, and the theories of Pierre Bourdieu in particular, in international relations (e.g. Adler-Nissen 2012). And others have written on the "sociology" of international relations, scrutinizing the conditions of knowledge by which it was formed as something distinct from national interests (e.g. McSweeney 1999). Michael Skey asks what forms of belongingness nations provide in an insecure world, interrogating the micro foundations of the security that foreign policy is meant to provide, while Derek McGhee (2010) analyzes the degree to which concerns over security expose different conceptions of citizenship and human rights.

<sup>3</sup> There are rare exceptions, but which date back decades. These include Altheide (1975), who discussed security as gatekeeping restricting physical access to certain locations, in the process results in the construction and reinforcement of racial and class boundaries, and Lowry (1972), who wrote on the interrelations of secrecy and security.

service provided by the state, most often referring to interstate war and sub-war conflicts.

Sociologists have engaged little with the concept of human security that emerged after the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report (e.g. Gasper 2005). Security-related research by sociologists has often focused on the production of expert knowledge and collective cultural interpretations of these problems, as well as about security and danger more generally, especially in regards to revolution, terrorism, state violence against domestic civilians, fear of crime, and disasters.

The disciplinary core of sociology, however, has more often focused on *insecurities* of various sorts, particularly *social, economic, or interpersonal*. This division is a function of the historical division of the “objects of knowledge” among the social sciences by which professional incentives within disciplines are organized around particular objects and levels of analysis. Sociologists tend to study processes within particular societies, leaving the study of other countries to anthropology and transnational politics to political science. Furthermore, “security” is not a category in which sociology departments generally hire, although they do hire scholars who study crime, law, deviance, social control, and, more recently, global processes. This means that relatively few sociologists will focus their attention on what we are here calling “political security,” at least until the interdisciplinary study of security makes claims upon the core of the discipline.

This chapter compares these two sociological conceptualizations of (in)security—political security versus social insecurities—including their main concepts, questions, and theories. We also highlight the research methods of exemplary studies, which like sociology itself span the range of quantitative and qualitative, case studies and comparative, social-psychological to historical, and various combinations of these. Within this methodological

diversity of sociology we see no particular patterns regarding methods and findings, perhaps because of the infrequency with which sociologists study political security. We then evaluate these research traditions for their promise to provide insights for the interdisciplinary study of political security, identifying areas of potential cross-fertilization. We further suggest that scholars should distinguish between political security as an explicit object of discourse and practice, and security as a broader category of cultural understandings of safety and disorder. We conclude that one of sociology's unique contributions are the tools to study the relationships among these different kinds of (in)security, connections that are lost when research focuses solely on external threats to the nation at the expense of internal, domestic processes.

## 2. *Sociologies of (in)security*

This section describes the recent engagements of sociologists with security and insecurity as subjective feelings and structural conditions at the level of the individual, the family, or the community.<sup>4</sup> These studies tend to reflect the fact that sociologists' commitments have long considered the role of gender, race, social class, sexuality, and other axes of difference in their effects on perceptions and implementations of security. At the most micro level, social psychologists and sociologists of emotion research security in terms of the attachments of children to their parents in the presence of family or economic stressors (see review by Thoits 1989). At the macro level, sociologists consider how citizen perceptions of security affect international policy, a topic to which we will return. For non-sociologists, we hope this review serves as a map of research traditions that have already grappled with some of the same

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<sup>4</sup> This review is based on a search for security in titles and abstracts of articles in 58 core sociology journals between 2000 and 2014. This netted 118 results, of which 63 were articles authored by sociologists. Of the 55 book reviews, several reviewed multiple books, many books were reviewed in more than one journal. Not all books were authored by sociologists, but their review in core journals reflects their influence in their respective sociological subfields.

epistemological and methodological issues as face contemporary security scholars. For sociologists, we hope it spurs more application of sociological insights to the problems of security.

Economic security is far and away the most robust engagement sociologists have with considerations of security and insecurity. Very few of these studies connect economic inequality to political security, however, representing a significant disconnect that future studies might address. The focus on the economy is particularly pronounced in English-language literature because the main defined-benefits program in the United States is called Social Security (key monographs include Amenta 2006, Béland 2005, Hardy and Hazelrigg 2010). However, the transnational project of the European Union has also provided an comparative focus to sociological analysis of economic stability politics (e.g. Muffels 2008, Hicks 2000).

Sociologists have long evaluated how government programs and changing work and retirement conditions affect measures of inequality and economic insecurity (e.g. Brady 2005). These include studying how low-income families respond to economic insecurity (e.g. Sherraden and McBride 2010). Domestic political opposition to entitlements programs has received sustained treatment as a cause and effect of income insecurity (Rogne et al. 2009), as has the global trend towards the privatization of government benefits (e.g. Quadagno 1998). Other trends that affect economic security include rates of immigration (Martin 2003) and the increase in casual labor at the expense of long-term work contracts (e.g. Bowles and MacPhail 2008). The relationships between these feelings of insecurity, general economic uncertainty, or rates of economic inequality on support for war or security policies are unexplored.

There is also a robust tradition of research on "food security," a concept sociologists study in three distinct ways: its relationship to community development, as a way of describing

risks to industrial agricultural food systems, and to describe hunger (see Mooney and Hunt 2009). Methodologically, these studies range across comparative statistical assessments of trajectories of country development (Scanlan 2003), interviews with farmers or patrons of farmers' markets, discourse analyses of scientific documents about organic food or foreign policy documents, and participant observations of community gardens or working family food preparation practices (e.g. Lawrence et. al. 2013).

More recently, precarity has become the term of art to describe studies of economic insecurity: "the temporary nature of jobs, the dismantling of social assistance programs, and the deepening of social inequality" (Purser 2013:74). The precarity paradigm integrates research from the micro-, meso- and macro- levels to view it "a source of individual and social vulnerability and distress, affecting family, housing and communal security" (Wilson and Ebert 2013:263). Especially prominent in studies of precarity are ethnographic engagements with part-time staffing agencies, documenting how this type of organization, which seems a valuable stop-gap for the unemployed, actually "systematically exploits and reproduces structural vulnerability in the labor market" (Elcioglu 2010:117). Sociologists also explore the impact of organizations on subjective perceptions of economic insecurity, ranging from unions (Martin 2003) employers (Appelbaum, et. al. 2006), and the lobbying activities of special-interest groups (Lynch 2011), to the impact of globalization and supply-chain economics on employment conditions (e.g. Bender and Greenwald 2003).

Other researchers consider the implications of policies that also describe security as designated by U.S. government programs. For example, anthropologist Lorna Rhodes' (2004) conducted an influential ethnography of inmate mental health in those U.S. federal prisons designated as "maximum security" by studying control units, the "prisons within the prisons."

She demonstrated forcefully how monsters and psychopaths are created in this process of harming some to create security for others: “being in prison itself is bound to cause harm through either neglect or attention, the degeneration of inmates evoking a contrast with better days—national and institutional as well as personal” (Rhodes 2004:119). The interconnections that ethnography permits across these levels--personal to national--are missing in other studies of security.

Similarly, schools have increasingly recategorized disciplinary problems as problems of security, rather than child behavior. Aaron Kupchik’s four-school comparison combines ethnography with quantitative analysis to conclude that “much of the new homeroom security is a response to fear and general insecurities rather than careful, evidence-based deliberation” (2010:9). He finds that such policies instead undermine the legitimacy of school discipline and reinforcing inequalities between families who can influence administrators and those who cannot.

Amy Hillier’s (2005) study examined how neighborhoods were assessed for investment risk in the 1930s. These “residential security maps,” as they became known, were based on passersby assessment of housing stock, proximity to industry, heterogeneity by religion (especially the presence of Jews or Catholics), ethnicity (cooking smells could indicate investment insecurity), or the presence of African Americans. These maps became the basis of a host of public and private credit programs, entrenching inequality in the name of investor “security.”

The media’s role in personal perceptions of security and fear has long been a staple of sociological research (see Altheide 1975, Sacco 1995). More recently, sociologists have explored why citizens “are afraid of the wrong things,” in Barry Glassner’s (1999) influential formulation

of how perceptions of risk far outstrip actual dangers. His dissection of media reports compares a wide range of topics' coverage to their statistical prevalence (ranging from pedophilia to political correctness and crack babies to crime), indicting media and politicians' accounts of dangers and bemoaning the ability of experts and data to gain traction.

Sociologists working in this area also frequently focus on the social construction of knowledge *about* threats and dangers. For example, Lynn Eden (2004) analyzed how the effects of nuclear explosion were underestimated due to the organizational conditions under which this knowledge was produced. The social construction of dangers—the processes by which phenomena come to be seen as social problems—has multiple lineages within sociology, ranging from the emergence of drunk drivers as an object of fear and coercive social policy (see Gusfield 1996) or the chronic misplaced fears that American society is falling apart (Fischer and Mattson 2009). They also focus on misplaced fears over moral and sexual matters, often called “moral panics,” that produce profound collective insecurity but also harmful policy responses that exacerbate inequalities (Altheide 2009; Hughes et al. 2011). At their most harmless, the responses do not address the underlying structural causes of the objects of concern. At worst, they punish the victims or vulnerable and misdirect public resources. “Sex panics,” a subset of moral panics, feature responses against a sexual threat that targets the already-marginalized and does nothing to address the structural sources of danger nor actual perpetrators (e.g. Lancaster 2011).

Sociological contributions of security as policing and risk management occur largely within interdisciplinary fields of criminology and law & society. An influential model of security as existing along multiple nodes among which the state is only one was developed by British criminologist Clifford Shearing (see current volume). Criminologists in particular have a long

tradition of robust empirical research documenting distinctions and interaction effects among objective crime rates, crime reportage, and subjective perceptions of crime and insecurity (e.g. Lane et. al. 2014). Criminologists have also applied traditional sociological understandings of crime to terrorism. Gary Lafree and Laura Dugan answer the question, “How Does Studying Terrorism Compare to Studying Crime?” arguing that “criminological theory, data collection, and methodological approaches are highly relevant to terrorism research and that applying criminological methods to the study of terrorism could rapidly increase our knowledge of terrorism and our understanding of its causes and consequences” (2004: 53).

Bernard Harcourt (2001) critiques the paradigm of “broken windows” policing, arguing that it is premised upon a (false) view of the world in which “These sharp categories- of law abiders and disorderly- divide the world into two distinct realms” (Harcourt 2001:125). Since the “broken windows” approach is both premised on false assumptions, and also, as Harcourt shows, is not actually effective in reducing violent crime, why has it been so popular? The practice of “broken windows policing” itself creates new categories of “orderly” and “disorderly” subjects, reframing the way in which we view certain actions (such as loitering) as harmful in and of themselves, which then acts to make “order-maintenance policing” seem necessary and right in response (2001:165). Titles like “Rational Fear or Represented Malaise” (Elchardus et. al. 2008), “Theorizing Fear of Crime: Beyond the Rational/Irrational Opposition” (Lupton and Tulloch 1999) summarize the robust findings that social inequalities affect dramatic mismatches between actual rates of victimization and perceptions of threat. This line of research has particularly explored axes of inequality on this gap between perception and victimization, especially in differences by gender, age, race and class.



At the intersection of criminology and urban sociology, fear and perceptions of security are embedded in physical places and how we talk about and remember them (see reviews by Taylor 1995; Loader and Walker 2007; Leverntz 2012). Researchers have long observed that neighborhood changes affect perceptions of crime even in the absence of actual changes in crime rates (e.g. Taylor 1995). In particular, increases in Black and Latino residents spur increases in fear for community security (see Lane et. al. 2014). Similarly, perceptions of social integration and closeness to neighbors affects both fear of crime and general feelings of happiness (Lotfi and Koohsari 2009, Adams and Serpe 2000).

Urban sociologists have also studied the effects of this fear on residents, ranging from the withdrawal of residents from the streets (Miethe 1995), to the rise of gated communities and other privatized neighborhood security measures (Vesselinov 2008). This tradition also distinguishes between perceptions of fear, trust and security (Walklate 1998), including the between fears for the self and fear on behalf of others, so-called “altruistic fear of crime” on behalf of hypothetical children, for example.

Ethnographies of gated communities by anthropologists have been especially influential within sociology for conveying the complex motives residents have regarding physical insecurity. Setha Low (2004) performed a comparative ethnography of residents in Phoenix and Mexico City. She found that residents seek a dual sense of security of “protecting the individual from physical harm as well as providing the sense of psychological well-being,” interpreting their desires as not necessarily for gates themselves, but that “it is through the symbolism of gates and walls that the desire of gated community residents to re-create their childhood environments becomes intertwined with security” (2004:90). Teresa Caldeira (2000) performed a different comparison of poor, middle-class and wealthy residents of Sao Paulo, examining how

all residents responded to fears of crime by closing themselves off in different ways, ranging from gated condominium communities to gated minds: “people feel restricted in their movements, afraid and controlled; they go out less at night, walk less on the street, and avoid the ‘forbidden zones’ that loom larger and larger in every resident’s mental map of the city” (2000:297). Demographic and fiscal analyses show the interrelationships of race, place, and perceptions of crime and security on rates of economic investment and gentrification (Hwang and Sampson 2014).

While others debate the degree to which a strong and competent security apparatus is necessary for democratic states, sociologists mainly study the decentralization of security *beyond* the state. These include the demands of private corporations, consumer demand for private security services, and organizations ranging from neighborhood associations to vigilante groups (see Wood and Dupont 2006). This shifting balance between private and public security forces has been the subject of considerable research (see Sherman 1995, Loader and Walker 2007). If state security forces are problematic, even more so are the unaccountable and unabashedly biased corporate ones. Another challenge to local, accountable policing forces is the spread of transnational policing agencies that relieve national agencies of blame for harsh practices against migrants, shifting responsibility to intergovernmental bodies like EUROPOL that are detached from domestic politics and interests.

This “commodification of policing and security” has several origins, including the spread of consumer culture, the rise of a private security market, and the weakening sense of democratic citizenship (e.g. Loader and Walker 2007). One result is that consumers demand visible policing practices that make them feel safe rather than prevent or solve crimes, for example. The transnational character of corporations means that the implementation of corporate security has

its own logics of implementing an internally consistent policy across multiple jurisdictions (see Walby and Lippert 2014). Dissatisfaction with state security can also lead to vigilante citizen security groups, such as the self-described Minutemen who patrol the United States border with Mexico to deter immigration (Doty 2007).

This section has recounted sociological engagements with security on its traditional disciplinary terrain, what we have characterized as sociological of insecurity. These range from research traditions with little intersection with political security, such as work on economic inequality, that present potent future research possibilities. Other areas, such as the work on fear of crime, offer significant possibilities for theoretical cross-fertilization with political security because of its relative maturity and robust empirical findings. This is not to say that sociologists have not engaged with “security” as such, a topic to which we now turn.

### 3. *The Sociology of Political Insecurity*

Sociologists have long studied war, conflict, protest, and revolution: topics that could be situated within a framework of security (and often have been by scholars in other disciplines), but sociologists have most often not framed their research into such topics as being primarily about “security.” These include classics of political sociology about revolutions and the rise of states (see Walder 2009) and more recent works about the role of war in state formation (Wimmer 2012; Tilly 1992). Similarly, sociologists have studied war, insurgency and soldiers, but largely in the subfield of military sociology (e.g. Kestnbaum 2009), with these studies of the military as an institution dating back to the “American soldier” studies that emerged out of World War II (Stouffer, 1949).

More recently, there has been renewed interest among sociologists in studying empire, imperialism, and colonialism (e.g. Steinmetz 2013). Gurinder Bhambra (2007) criticized

sociology's generalizations of modernity that ignored Europe's colonial needs for, among other things, security for trade. Julian Go (2012) provides a devastating empirical examination of the ways in which American imperialism is not unique but repeats the British Empire's economic and military patterns. Again, however, these topics have not been framed primarily as studies of political "security."

Finally, sociologists have also addressed violence as a general social phenomenon. Malesevic (2010) situates violence within classical and contemporary social theory, discusses the social role of war and violence in modernity and pre-modernity, and discusses how war both draws upon and affects nationalism, social inequality, and gender divides. Social theorist Randall Collins produced a magisterial (2008) work on violence which, as the title suggests, was almost entirely focused on person-to-person violence. Collins suggests that when, and how, violence occurs can be understood through an analysis of the interactional relations among small groups at points of conflict. In contrast to Collins' micro-sociological approach, Michel Wieviorka's (2009) book is a sweeping account of how we should understand the role of violence in modern society and (re)establish it as central to social theorizing, addressing sources of political violence, the role of violence in the formation of states, the role of the media, interpretations of violence, and their interconnections.

More recently, however, sociologists have increasingly taken an interest in the more "political" or state-centered forms of security. These include studies of topics that tend to fall within the definition of security used by other disciplines, as protection from violence when the state as a key actor. In particular, sociologists have tackled the relationship between security and such topics such as terrorism, state violence, security expertise, disaster and catastrophe, and violence as a social phenomenon.

Since 2001, sociologists have taken a particular interest in "terrorism," (an early review of this literature was by Turk 2004). Whereas much of the extant literature on terrorism by non-sociologists has treated it as a problem *sui generis*, sociologists have drawn insights from the discipline's tradition of studying social movements and social protest, introducing new theoretical and analytical approaches, and providing useful correctives to the "problem of definition" which has tended to stymie the field (e.g. Beck 2008, Bergesen and Han 2006, Kurzman 2011, Tilly 2006). Other sociologists have focused on the production of discourse about "terrorism," focusing on the processes of knowledge and culture by which threats of terrorism are classified and produced (e.g. Altheide 2004; Bail 2012; Miller and Mills 2009; Stampnitzky 2013a). For example, Colin Beck and Emily Miner analyze how governments formally designate some groups and not others as "terrorists," finding that groups that engage in violence against civilians are more likely to be formally designated as terrorists by states if they "target aviation" or if they have an "Islamic ideological basis" (2013:837).

Robin Wagner-Pacifici's *Discourse & Destruction: The city of Philadelphia versus MOVE* (1995), analyzes the events that led up to the violent confrontation between an urban police force and a radical black separatist group that ended with 11 members of MOVE dead and the destruction of an entire city block. Through interviews, hearing testimony, and an analysis of government documents she makes sense of the rival ways that city officials classified MOVE, how the classification of terrorist won, and how escalations in narrative served interests on both sides, leading to conflict. Wagner-Pacifici's account warrants particular attention for the ways in which the melodramatic language of war was deployed at the municipal level, labelling MOVE children as feral or young terrorists. These narratives, playing out in the otherwise dispassionate

context of bureaucratic memos and lawyer-speak justified an intervention that remains controversial to this day.

By treating terrorism as a variation of social protest and conflict, sociologists have made contributions such as theorizing under what circumstances groups will engage in or refrain from using terrorist tactics. Jeff Goodwin (2006a) draws on sociological theories of rebellion and revolution to argue that terrorism is most likely to occur when (potential) proponents of such acts see civilians (potentially to be targeted) as categorically different from themselves, and as complicitous with the state which is their target, and, conversely, so long as insurgents see civilians as potential supporters, they will not be attacked. Further, he suggests that when states blur boundaries between government actors and citizens, or between military and civilians, this makes it more likely that potential terrorists will do the same, that the presence of affective ties between insurgents and privileged groups will tend to work against the likelihood of categorical terrorism (Goodwin 2006b).

Charles Kurzman (2011) takes a counterintuitive tack in *The Missing Martyrs: Why There are So Few Muslim Terrorists?* The question he poses is this: “if there are more than a billion Muslims in the world, many of whom supposedly hate the West and desire martyrdom, why don’t we see terrorist attacks everywhere, every day?” (2007:7). An expert on social movement theory and the Iranian Revolution, Kurzman answers his question using interviews, surveys of public opinion, political documents, and casualty statistics. He finds that the biggest deterrents against terrorism are Muslims themselves, among whom terrorist movements are thoroughly marginal. Despite widespread anger against Western government interference, terrorist attacks overwhelmingly turn Muslims against radical Islamists. Kurzman argues that the best way to win hearts and minds is to listen to liberal Muslims, even when their advice is to not

embrace them too closely: “if anybody is going to be discredited by association with American hegemony, Muslim liberals may prefer it to be their rivals” (2011:161).

Sociologists have also studied state violence, including torture and other human rights violations often perpetrated in the name of "security." These have included comparisons of state violence in Serbia and Israel (Lazreg 2008), or Lisa Hajjar's (2013) recent overview of torture that compares its use in ancient, colonial and neocolonial contexts. She summarizes the sociological answers to such questions as torture's prevalence, why organizations torture, whether it works, why accountability is so difficult to enact, and the uses of human rights to prevent it. James Ron (2003) uses interviews, fieldwork, and documents to conduct a comparative analysis of state violence in Serbia and Israel, to develop a theory of why states will engage in more or less brutal forms of repression: why states will sometimes engage in ethnic cleansing, and at others in what he labels “ethnic policing,” showing that it is important to study not just when or whether states will engage in violence, but how and why.

Studies of disaster and catastrophe represent another frequent topic of study for sociologists (see Freudenburg et. al. 2012), a research tradition summarized succinctly by the title of a volume about Hurricane Katrina: *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster* (Squires and Hartman 2006). This subfield has a long and distinguished history within sociology, starting with Kai Erickson's (1976) study *Everything in its Path*, an analysis of the Buffalo Creek flood in West Virginia that killed 125 and displaced over 4,000. Through his own interviews and by analyzing tens of thousands of pages of transcripts collected by the survivors' legal team, Erickson described the factors that influenced the trauma of survivors, claiming that what psychiatrists were diagnosing only measured individual trauma, when survivors were actually mourning a lost communality and the everyday ties disrupted by their haphazard relocation to

trailer camps. Erickson introduced the influential distinction between disasters not only as acute events, but also as chronic conditions, such as poverty, individual isolation, or racism.

Eric Klinenberg's (2002) *Heat Wave* was an influential work in this tradition that studied how social inequalities structured the mortality rates and reportage of the 1995 Chicago heat wave that killed over 700 people. Through interviews, an ethnography of a major newspaper newsroom, and detailed analyses of epidemiological reports, he showed that the 30-fold difference in death rates between African American and Latino men was largely the product of living alone, something uncommon among the latter.

These classics underpinned an explosion of such studies on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that analyzed the failures of the U.S. government. Two especially influential edited volumes contained mixed-method studies of the way stratification and inequality affected the decisions that caused and exacerbated the Hurricane's destructiveness, inequalities that were subsequently magnified by the unequal responses by government and non-profit agencies (e.g. Bankston et. al. 2010, Squires and Hartman 2006).

Sociologists have often studied disaster as an organizational problem. Vaughn (1997) analyzes the 1986 Challenger shuttle explosion as not merely a technical failure, but as the result of an organizational structure which made it difficult for certain types of information about risk to be effectively communicated. Perrow (1984)'s *Normal Accidents* posits that certain types of failures are unavoidable in complex systems such as nuclear reactors, and that expectations that accidents will not occur are unrealistic. He documents how redesigns that implement redundancies into the system might appear to solve such problems, but such reworkings will themselves introduce new potential points of failure. Lee Clarke's (1999) *Mission Improbable* considers the similarities among terrorism, nuclear accidents, and assassinations, arguing that



organizations construct "fantasy documents" that make us feel like there are plans in place but can end up making us less safe in the end by pretending that the unknown is known.

Further areas studied by sociologists that would could fall within the domain of "security" studies include the intersections of science, technology and safety. For example, Jeanne Guillemin (2005) has both studied the ways in which expert knowledge about biological agents transformed them into potential weapons, information that both created security threats and had to be protected as a threat to security itself. David Lyon and David Wood (2012) assess the mixed empirical results of surveillance tactics to provide security, ranging from closed-circuit television and computer privacy safeguards to biometrics and credit card tracking, topics taken up in Torin Monahan's (2006) edited volume as well. The ways in which safety and security are themselves embedded within commonsense cultural understandings are reviewed by Susan Silbey (2009), who argues that claims that a "safety culture" can be created are belied by sociological understandings of culture as emergent and indeterminant.

Sociologists, following Ulrich Beck's (1992) influential theorization of modernity as the assessment and anticipation of risk, have also theorized the security in these terms (see review by Elliott 2002). Studies in this "risk society" tradition analyze how the disruptions caused by globalization are "prejudged" by governmental and corporate actors, meaning that understandings of risk have their own effects beyond the underlying processes of globalization. Some suggest that all sites of social uncertain and risk can be incorporated within the umbrella of security studies. Bajc (2013) anticipates a time when the voluminous data collected by government agencies will be turned over to researchers, which will allow " the creators to divide the world into taxonomies in such a way that each person can be unambiguously positioned into a single category, information related to such category accumulated methodically, and

specifications devised on how to act on this information” (Bajc 2013: 619). But others have countered that states have commonly failed at such attempts at rationalization, because problems of security tend to overflow customary categories and logics because of the ease with which non experts can make claims about it (Stampnitzky 2013b; de Goede 2008).

#### 4. *For a sociology of (political) security*

Why should sociologists study security? What are sociology’s unique contributions to its study? And in what ways might sociologists connect the insights at the core of their discipline to the interdisciplinary debate? For sociologists to contribute, their research needs to move from a sociology of insecurity to a sociology of security. To put it another way, sociologists need to leverage their understandings of insecurity as a subjective perception to study how it is made real by institutions and practices. Key areas in which this work might be done are in the questions of what is done in the name of security, how certain phenomena but not others are classified as security problems, and the processes by which practices of “security” travel from one social field to others.

One of the key contributions of sociological approaches to political security are answers to the question: why is studying security so difficult? The problem stems in part because from the concept’s polysemy (Ranasinghe 2013; Stampnitzky 2013b; Valverde 2011, Zedner 2003). Yet, as Joseph Masco notes, the term “is almost never defined by those in the political arena who rely almost entirely on it. It is rather more commonly evoked as a self evident good, a rationale for wide-ranging and (particularly in the United States) often quite extreme political visions” (Masco 2010:509). This bifurcation thus suggests that there are two epistemologies of security in contemporary scholarship that structure how it is studied. One is to study security as an objective, real state of affairs, which means accepting or refuting the political definitions on their

own terms. The alternative is to study security as a terrain of discourses and practices that are applied by powerful actors to different sites at different points in time, looking for places where security could have been invoked but was not, the irregular application of security practices, or the way actors or institutions resist some definitions of security over others.

In the objective tradition of security as *realpolitik*, sociologists have used their traditional disciplinary tools to measure the realities of security, although they have not conceived it in the terms of the interdisciplinary study of political security. For example, sociological studies of “family security” use the word as a synonym for stability. This suggests fruitful opportunities for connecting the micro world of family economic insecurity to broader questions of political insecurity. We know less about how perceptions of security threats vary among people of different social classes, or whether rates of economic inequality affect population-level perceptions of political security, or how changes in “family security” affect public opinion in favor of war, the curtailment of civil liberties, or other political interventions.

In the subjective, social constructionist tradition, security has been studied as a terrain of discourses and practices that can only be understood in particular contexts at limited historical moments. Some of the strongest, and most distinctive, contributions of sociologists to the study of security stem from such analyses of the production of knowledge and cultural interpretations about security. These range from studies of how individuals understand security threats, to studies of societal commemorations, to analyses of the production of official discourses about “security.”

Tamar Liebes (1992) provided an influential analysis of how Israelis developed political worldviews about security in response to media consumption. Through interviews, she found that viewers of television news tended to develop more “hawkish” security views. This was not

necessarily because news shows were deliberately biased, but because “dovish” positions depended on communicating ambiguities that were less powerfully communicated through television than the seemingly more straightforward “hawkish” positions.

Later, Andrew Perrin (2005) analyzed a stratified random sample of over 1000 letters to the editor published in major newspapers before and after the September 11, 2001, attacks. He coded the letters for statements regarding authoritarianism and anti authoritarianism to understand how the threat posed by terrorist attacks affected the political attitudes of ordinary people. Rather than a simple rise in authoritarianism in response to the attacks, he found an increase in both discourses, arguing that they “are paired elements of political culture that are invoked together in the face of a national threat” (2005:167).

Mohr and his collaborators (2013), on the other hand, analyzed the framing of security threats at the national political level by studying the texts of U.S. National Security Strategies. They did this by analyzing the texts via computer-automated textual coding, applying Kenneth Burke’s concept of a “grammar of motives” to the documents. Christina Simko (2012) analyzed the production of collective meanings about security threats in social commemorations, analyzing all Presidential speeches about 9/11 and the speeches given at annual memorial services at the Pentagon, in Manhattan, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. She found that site-specific meanings were durable, affecting subsequent performances even by political rivals: Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, though from different parties and political leanings, used the same tropes at different sites, meaning that the meanings of the attacks remained “tragedy” in Manhattan but “sacrifice” at the other two sites. Her research suggests the power of initial interpretations of disasters to shape future responses.

Much of the work in this area focuses on the production of public knowledge about—or denial of—security, insecurity, danger, or other threats. Stanley Cohen's (2001) *States of Denial* connected individual states of denial, as over alcoholism, to societal-level denial over political atrocities. From case studies ranging from “passive bystanders” and “compassion fatigue” to genocides and Truth Commissions, he derives the lesson that the value of “inclusivity” must be promoted and “passivity” shamed if information about horrors might lead to political interventions. Sutton and Norgaard investigated denial at the individual and social level through in-depth interviews to explain “why and how do individuals distance themselves from information about their government's participation in torture and other human rights violations?” (Sutton and Norgaard 2013:495). They found that varieties of denial are shaped by social and political contexts.

Similarly, Jared Del Rosso (2011, 2014) examined the social “denial” of torture in texts produced by the war on terror, advancing work done earlier by Gregory Hooks and Clayton Mosher’s (2005) analysis of official justifications given for torture at Abu Ghraib.

Rachel Wahl, in contrast, conducted interviews and fieldwork with law enforcement officers’ to elicit their explanations for “why they torture.” She found that police “torture more widely than their own conceptions of justice allow, but see this as an imperfect implementation of their principles rather than a violation of them,” which contrasts with understandings that human rights ideas are merely imperfectly understood in local contexts (2014:807). Torture is thus not necessarily a failure of human rights, but may be put in service of them.

A related area where sociologists have also made significant contributions is the production of security knowledge and expertise, a field that draws upon sociology’s traditional focus on occupational legitimacy and professionalization (e.g. Eyal and Pok 2011). Gil Eyal

(2006) analyzed the interconnections of academia and the military in Israel, asking why academic scholars of the Middle East would get involved in military intelligence work. He traced how the social structure of the expert field led certain types of experts to influence policy and public discourse more than others, and finding that, as one group of experts, the “Arabists,” were usurped, this led to changes in both how Israeli national identity was constructed, and how Israel constructed security policies against the Palestinians.

Lisa Stampnitzky (2013a) analyzed the changing production of expert knowledge about political violence arguing that the category of “terrorism” and the role of the “terrorism expert” have been co-produced. Based on interviews with contemporary security experts, archival research on the history of knowledge production about terrorism from the 1960s until the 2000s, and a network analysis of the participants in terrorism conferences, Stampnitzky traced the shifting definitions of what constituted terrorism in relation to the institutional origins of the claimants. She found that experts were unable to define terrorism with any degree of specificity, leaving them unable to prevent political or media figures from anointing acts as terrorism that did not meet any consistent criteria. Stampnitzky argues that this reveals that terrorism, as a social problem, is inseparable from the experts who arose to talk about it, meaning we must attend closely to the ways in which problems and experts are intertwined.

In addition to the study of expertise itself, sociologists have studied how policymakers construct meanings of danger and threats, and the technologies through which they do this, as in Gregoire Mallard and Andrew Lakoff's (2011) study how "techniques of prospection" are used by leaders to imagine future threats. Similarly, Melinda Cooper's (2010) study of how the forecasting technique of "scenario planning" has travelled from the world of security and disaster planning to other realms, such as finance.

Perhaps the most unique contribution of sociologists to are those innovative studies that connect perceptions of security to international relations. For example, Joane Nagel (2011) provides an optimistic account of climate change policy despite widespread skepticism in the U.S. population that climate change exists, is caused by humans, or requires policy response. By her account, the adoption of climate change policies among two of the most conservative elite communities—the military and international corporations—means that American policy will address climate change despite popular skepticism. Her assessment was later confirmed by media reports, highlighting the advantages of applying the sociology of risk perception to traditional considerations of political security.

These studies of collective understandings of security are akin to, but not exactly the same as, “securitization theory” as studied by political scientists (see Bourbeau 2014, Buzan et. al. 1997). In this case, sociologists might study how “securing the family” became a concern in the early 21st century among religious conservatives in American suburbs. Similarly, sociologists might study why the military has been the primary site of American concerns about security and *not* the family, and how this application of security to some domains over others is produced, and by whom. Sociologists have indeed studied why some sites over others have become “securitized.” For example, climate change has recently become defined as a threat to national security by the U.S. Department of Defense, which has complicated its relation to its traditional supporters on the conservative right. While the objective tradition would accept this classification and use sociological tools to measure the ways in which climate change is a security threat, the subjective tradition (e.g. Nagel 2011) would problematize how the domains of environmental and military expertise came to be connected at a particular moment.

We argue that the sociological approach brings particular value to the latter. This is both because the former tradition is well-represented by other disciplines both theoretically and empirically, and because sociologists are already working in ways that challenge the first approach. The fact that sociologists are already studying so many disparate objects, sites, and institutions in the name of “security” already suggests that is an inherently unstable object. A coherent way to move forward from this bifurcation would be to foreground the traditional sociological contributions to the construction of social problems to study the problematization of security itself.

To study what is done in the name of security, sociologists should study the discourses, practices, institutions, and policies that determine the content of security in particular contexts. Key questions that orient this line of future research are: what is the object of security, how is it produced, what does it govern, and what are the effects? The contemporary classics that should provide foundations include the work of Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2008) on how “critical infrastructure” became a concept that governments and corporations must assess in terms of security.

Similarly, Melinda Cooper and Jeremy Walker (2011) contend that the concept of “resilience,” first a governmental antidote to security, smuggled those concerns into mainstream social scientific research. As they summarize: “we trace the genealogy of 'resilience' from its first formulation in ecosystems theory to its recent proliferation across disciplines and policy arenas loosely concerned with the logistics of crisis management.” We concur that these processes by which practices of “security” travel from one field to another (as also deftly illustrated by Jennifer Light’s (2003) research on how technologies of warfare and urban combat became



incorporated into mainstream urban planning) should be another key domain for sociological investigation.

Another model is Harvey Molotch's (2012) *Against Security*, which deftly traces how "security" is produced through social and environmental practices—sometimes resulting in less, rather than more, safety. His wide-ranging book incorporates interviews, ethnography, and analysis of government documents that cover a host of sites that scholars of political security would recognize—subways, airports, and the Ground Zero site in lower Manhattan. But he begins his discussion with public restrooms, using them to exemplify how they are sites of "ambiguous dangers," especially for women, that have attracted lots of possible solutions except the one that might actually make women safer: gender-neutral bathrooms. This illustration grounds Molotch's discussions of practical physical changes (wider stairwells) and policies that empower individuals with the flexibility to respond to novel circumstances.

In conclusion, sociologists have particular contributions to make to the interdisciplinary study of security by 1) connecting their core disciplinary concerns with domestic insecurity to broader political insecurity, and 2) by problematizing the interdisciplinary engagement with security as an objective phenomenon. The former synthesis is open ground waiting to be explored. The latter overlaps with other disciplinary contributions to security studies. Fruitful understandings of security are unlikely to come from either objective studies that pretend there is no ambiguity about security, nor subjective studies that destabilize security so fully that they ignore the very real feelings, behaviors, and institutional responses that are organized around it. To understand how security is or is not the pursuit of war by other means, a rational response to ambiguous or distant threats, or some combination of the two, we need context-bound, empirical accounts of how security operates in specific institutional frameworks. Only through such

research can the contradictions, discontinuities, and organizational logics that “security” enables be uncovered.

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