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## "Strong Objectivity" in Security Studies: Ethnographic Contributions to Method Development

Anna Leander

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# “Strong Objectivity” in Security Studies: Ethnographic Contributions to Method Development

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by

Anna Leander ([ale.lpf@cbs.dk](mailto:ale.lpf@cbs.dk))

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# “Strong Objectivity” in Security Studies: Ethnographic Contributions to Method Development<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

As the editors of this volume explore above, the approaches to security and have expanded considerably as have the conceptualizations of security tied to them. Part and parcel of this expansion has been the consolidation of “Critical Security Studies” (henceforth CSS) as integral to the “mainstream” in Security Studies (Fierke, 2007 for an overview and introduction). CSS is best characterised as a broad family of approaches that share a post “post-linguistic turn” approach to the study of international security rather diverse security.<sup>2</sup> As such CSS has played a core part in placing issues of pertaining to “culture” in generally and security culture in particular on the agenda of security studies. In the process, they have also been at the forefront when it comes to developing “methodologies” for post-linguistically informed studies in the realm of security. However, while the contribution of CSS to enlarging, enriching and advancing the security studies agenda is well acknowledged, its methodological this contributions are far less so. While the CSS “campfire” (Sylvester, 2014 forthcoming) seems to have the capacity to warm debates well beyond the own inside circles, its methodological part is more like a faint glow turning into ashes that capable of attracting no one, not even really the card-carrying, flag-waving members of the CSS group. The consensus on the outside seems to be that CSS is underdeveloped, unclear and messy methodologically speaking and on the inside that methods questions are tedious relics from a positivistic past. In spite of a stream of publications from the CSS camp on methods expressly intent on breaking this consensus,<sup>3</sup> the image is very “sticky”. Hence scholars flirting with CSS ideas often prefer to dodge the methods questions and if forced to be explicit on them will often desert their own camp. This chapter is (yet another) contribution to this flow of arguments.

The chapter picks up on one specific source of scepticism as regards CSS methods (the idea that it is not “objective”) and tries to turn the tables by showing that in reality CSS scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Comments by the editors have played a fundamental role the final shape of this argument. In addition to this, comments on earlier versions by the participants in the workshop Dialogues on Security (Frankfurt, 4-5/10/2012) and in the colloquium at Collegio Carlo Alberto (Moncalieri, 14/2/2013) as well as by Stefano Guzzini, Patrick Jackson and Piki Ish-Shalom are gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> For a more extended discussion of this broad understanding see (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006). Obviously, I don’t think the argument has some kind of geographical limitation to Europe.

<sup>3</sup> See among many (Klotz and Depaak, 2008, Weber, 2006, Salter and Can, 2012, Shapiro, 2012, Aradau and Huysmans, 2013).

have a “strong understanding of objectivity”, that is a step forward (not backwards) in terms of thinking about how to study security generally and security cultures specifically. The chapter develops this point in three steps: it begins by introducing the idea of a “strong objectivity” anchored in the nitty-gritty steps of research and proceeds to demonstrate how it is practiced in the process of gathering and presenting results in ethnographic CSS research insisting along the way that what is often interpreted as lack of “objectivity” is in fact a reflection of a more adequate understanding of what “objectivity” may entail.

### **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 data (information) or even as possible research objects 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 especially of a more robust *practice* of objectivity in research. This “strong objectivity” is *not* anchored the widely shared understanding that “objectivity” is different from “neutrality” and that occasionally the presence of values may 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 the desired/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 the strong objectivity and presence in CSS is different. What unites CSS is a post-linguistic approach to security. Beyond the internal variety, CSS is therefore aware of the centrality of language and meaning for security. Consequently, it tends to focus on the processes and mechanisms of meaning production. Obviously, research is integral to this reproduction. Therefore problematizing the observer/observation link is a quintessential to post-linguistic turn approaches (Guzzini, 2000). Objectivity in research therefore can no longer be the view from nowhere. All observation is embedded and embodied. This poses some quite serious challenges to standard understanding of what objectivity in research may mean.

Most centrally, seeing research as embedded/embodied implies that objectivity can no longer be contained to a space of outside and above the research but sneak into it. Answering questions about objectivity therefore requires a correspondingly more demanding (or strong) understanding of what objectivity entails. It is no longer merely about the big picture of how specific research agendas or conclusions may have implications but about how meaning is also involved in the nitty-gritty of the research process. As Harding explains, to capture 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...” (Harding, 1993: 18). Along similar lines, Pierre Bourdieu’s suggests that scholars

should reread Weber, pay attention to his distinction between axiological and epistemological value neutrality, and place more weight on the latter:

“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”. (2005: 61).

The contribution of CSS scholars to understandings of objectivity is precisely that they tend to work with this “stronger” understanding of objectivity. The visibility of values in CSS is hence *not* a step away from “objectivity”. They signal an awareness that objectivity cannot be confined to the axiological realm but must involve, as Bourdieu puts it, our “most elementary sociological practices”. CSS scholars are not alone to be aware of the “epistemological side” of objectivity as expressed in elementary research practices. Space is devoted to it in conventional methodological thinking including by positivists such as Hempel, Popper or King Keohane and Verba (“The KKV” methods book that long held a canonical standing in International Relations). However, not only is there a considerable gap between the positivist theory of science and mainstream security study practice— usually less sensitive to the “epistemological” sides of neutrality—there has been far less willingness to take on the implications in research practice. This is where CSS has a “methodological contribution” to make. The chapter shows this departing from the research practice in CSS, rather than a meta-theoretical argument, zooming in on Ethnographers working in CSS (ECSS<sup>4</sup>). The reason for privileging ethnographic approaches is twofold: (i) the epistemological issues anchored in elementary research practices are extensively debated; and (ii) focusing on ethnography (somewhat) reduces complexity that would be involved in trying to span too many CSS fields at the same time. This choice flavours the argument. However, also other CSS approaches adopt “strong objectivity” even if the way they express this and the deal with the implications are different.

To bring out the way ECSS work with objectivity in research practice the chapter looks at how ECSS conceive of objectivity in the two fundamental step of the research process: in gathering data (context of observation) and in presenting it (context of justification).<sup>5</sup> The chapter proceeds by demonstrating that adopting a strong approach to objectivity reverses two

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<sup>4</sup> Ethnography is used here in the conventional sense of referring to research that is “..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” “..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 the research 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).

<sup>5</sup> A third aspect (in addition to data gathering and presentation) is obviously “analysis”. However, ethnographers often do not think much about analysis. They do not construct models and most of the time they make much of the analysis in the process of their field work looking at their note. The time of ethnographic work tends to merge analysis into the gathering and presentation as an earlier version of this chapter explained. “This book does not contain a chapter on analysis” reads the characteristic introduction to a textbook in ethnographic method (Czarniawska, 2007). In this final version I adopt to ethnographic practice and skip “analysis”.

golden rules of “objective research”: that research should (i) follow strictly defined, stringent, fixed and unchanging rules and that (ii) researchers should refrain from engaging personally and especially emotionally with their research object. The rationale behind these golden rules is that fixed research procedures ensure that research is more than a mere reflection of the values and subjective interests of the researcher that might change at a whim, with fashion or with pressures from politics and funders and disengagement ensures that research is about the object of research rather than about something the researcher has pressured, distorted it into being or about the researcher’s own feelings about it. The influence of these two characteristics on methods thinking is palpable in the standard requirements that hypotheses informed by theories be elaborated, operationalized so that these can inform the data selection in a research process where any visible (especially emotional) engagement by the researcher is suspicious.<sup>6</sup> The account below shows that precisely because they adopt a “strong objectivity” ethnographers working in ECSS adopt a diametrically opposite understanding of what is required “objectivity”: they embrace both flexible procedures and personal and emotional researcher engagement both in the context of observation and in the context of justification.

### **Data Gathering: Strong Objectivity the Context of Observation**

ECSS reverse prevailing ideas about objective research in its approach to gathering material—or “data”—for analysis. As this section elaborates, 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. ECSS, as most ethnographic research, recognizes the “symmetrical” character of knowledge (e.g. Brewer, 2000, Czarniawska, 2007, Latour, 2005). Scholarly knowledge is one of many knowledge forms that are symmetrical in the sense that they have their own classificatory systems and ways of constituting social meaning. This recognition in turn demands research practices open to the possibility that unforeseen things may matter in unanticipated ways; that is a research practice allowing for non-fixed procedures and researcher engagement.

### **Non-Fixed Procedures Designed to Discover Multiple “Morphologies”**

“Consistent method is bad method” (Miller, 2003: 77) 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 is likely not only to devalue forms of knowledge that fall outside this scope, but they may entirely block themselves from understanding their research object. Fixity in other words introduces serious bias in the research practice. These points are rather straightforward when considered in practical research terms.

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<sup>6</sup> For both points see instructions for research councils or general methods books such as (King et al., 1994, Saunders et al., 2009, Przeworski and Salomon, 1995).

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 rather clear ideas about what kind of things they are looking for and why. However, when they begin the research it may, or rather usually does, turn out that other things are rather more informative, interesting and helpful for answering their questions than they thought at the outset. Even worse it may turn out that the questions and hypothesis they departed with were not the most fruitful or interesting. This experience is perhaps more common in ethnographic research than elsewhere precisely because it involves doing “fieldwork”. Indeed, part and parcel of the reason for doing ethnographies is to be able to take in the full repertoire of data (ranging from spatial arrangements, pictures, body-language, or clothing and art forms), to “go native” enough to understand what counts to the “tribe” and hence also to decide that other questions than those foreseen were more relevant. Higate did probably not anticipate the relevance of “cat-food” (more specifically of the unspectacular, demeaning task of providing security for women shopping cat-food in Kabul) for the status of private security contractors in security work in Afghanistan (Higate, 2011). This process 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). Instead, creativity in approaching data gathering and flexibility to adjust the aims it serves depending on what one learns the context is elevated to a virtue necessary if the multiple and contextual nature of knowledge is to be respected.

The argument is taken further by the ECSS who insist that even more serious biases may be introduced as fixed procedures are allowed may blocked certain research endeavours altogether. It may be difficult to find the kind of data and answer the kinds of questions envisaged by conventional methods indictments and theories. Scholars with a fixed approach to data gathering, will then be prone to abandon their research focus and hence many of the obviously most important issues in security studies (for example those involving gender, intelligence services or organized crime). ECSS by contrast would then to take a more pragmatic approach and “construct their research object on the basis of information available” (Bourdieu, et al., 2005: 193-265). Hence, In her work on Global Outlaws, Nordstrøm for example retraces the role of the Angolan military [about which there is little “hard data”] in the production of global outlaws by talking to taxi-drivers, NGO workers and businessmen (Nordstrom, 1997: 37-44). More than this, it may involve moving away from “fieldwork” conventionally understood. Hence, work on biographies (Higate, 2012, Czarniawska, 1999), web-marketing (Schneiker and Joachim, 2012, Leander, 2013) or information compiled by journalists (Stroschein, 2012, Leander, 2012) may prove useful ways of accessing “tribes” that do not easily let foreigners in or that live a virtual or multisited life . In fact ECSS, will happily mix heterogeneous sources following as they become available rather oblivious of whether or not they are the sources that were fixed as the right ones an original research design or whether they are suitable for the operationalization of the theoretical questions that may indeed themselves involve in the process. In so doing they are behaving in accordance with the established ethnographic cannon according

to 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 put together an understanding of the processes s/he intends to study (Latour, 1993: 7). However, again, this obviously demands flexibility.

The first, insight ECSS brings to security studies about “objective” research practices is in other words that rather contrary to the assumption that objectivity requires fixing procedures for gathering data it demands flexibility. 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 elaboration of this point see Bourdieu, 2012: 463). It is also a necessity if the door is not to be closed on unconventional questions and inquiries based on unconventional knowledge forms. Flexibility in data gathering is in other words not something ethnographers think of as a regrettable practical necessity imposed by the circumstances of their work but rather something they deal with 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 strengthening the objectivity of their research rather than something to be hidden away. Being a “fly on the wall” is a practical impossibility when it comes to fieldwork (besides 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 (as much as Evans Pritchard was among the Zande). This is the fate of ECSS. But ECSS see engagement as enhancing rather 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 engagement entails are an important source of information in their own right. Again these points are rather straight forward when presented in relation to research practice.

The idea of drawing on researcher engagement to shape information in ways making it more objective it is probably less outlandish than it appears. The observed (diplomats, security contractors...) 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. The engagement of white, female, feminist researchers with field-work about soldiering in the DRC will predictably produce different results than the engagement of a black, male, military official would. They can bring out for example the complex negotiation of identities among female soldier that would otherwise be overlooked (Stern, 2013). Engagement, in clear, fashions what data is (and can be) gathered in field work. 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 “transcendent culture of no culture” (Harraway, 1997: 37) to which researchers can resort to create an illusion that they are objectivity). ECSS therefore follow the trodden paths of ethnographers who turn the 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). They can consequently compensate for the effects of engagement for example by involving others in the research or by using the engagement to push/help the observed to provide information the researcher could not otherwise have access to but that they would not have articulated themselves. Much like Bourdieu ECSS researches 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” (not to say manipulation) of “data” would not be viewed diminishing objectivity. On the contrary, ECSS it would view it as part of the more general effort of consciously strengthening it. It deals with the consequences of engagement instead of allowing the delusion of a space where engagement has no consequences to bias research and diminish 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 be unaccounted for, ECSS have made considerable efforts to include emotions as a key in 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 gather data about emotions (e.g. Bleiker and Hutchinson, 2008, Fierke, 2013). But more than this, they have opened up for the idea that the emotional engagement of the researcher may be an important source of data in its own right (e.g. Sylvester, 2011). Again this follows logically from the accepting thinking about 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. Hence textbooks in ethnographic methods instruct researchers to be careful in acknowledging their emotions (Brewer, 2000). 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: 74). In other cases, emotions make research extremely difficult. Acknowledging this may be a far better research strategy than persisting as pursuing is more likely to produce nervous breakdowns than books or PhDs (Czarniawska, 2007). For ECSS researchers this explicit and visible presence of emotions in research process is therefore not something that signals that they have a deficient understanding of objectivity. On the contrary, they see it as 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.

To highlight the importance for objective research practices of making the personal and emotional engagement of the researcher engagement in data gathering visible and explicit is the second contribution of ECSS to discussions about objective research methods. The first was their insistence that research methods needed to be flexible and evolving rather than fixed prior to research work. This reverses standard precepts of how the context of observation should be approached to ensure the objectivity of research i.e. 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 but especially emotional engagement with the reversed. The strong objectivity of ECSS rests on a flexible, creative, 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 on ECSS view what is entailed in objective presentations of research results; for how they think researchers should communicate with the context of justification. 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 anonymous invisible, voice that provides the account. This form of relation to the context of justification may (or rather often is) effective in construing scientific authority. However, for ECSS the kind of that authority undermines rather than sustains objectivity. For ECSS objectivity is far better served by flexible forms and formats of data presentation making it possible to communicate multiple and contradictory meanings and by a visible (personal and emotional) researcher engagement. They are the necessary if research communication is to be able to do more than reproduce the profoundly biased and power-laden assumption that the academia has a status of a world apart which can see and understand everything without having an impact on anything.

### **Non-Fixed Procedures Conveying Multiple, Contradictory Meanings**

Ethnographers are concerned with a communication of the researched which is not distorted by permitting academic and theoretical interest to overshadow it. They wish to limit the risks or violence of writing” the multiplicity, contradictory meanings of the observed out of existence by forcing it into the straight jacket of academic research (Bourdieu, 1999: 622) and in so doing provide an objective account of the observed in a stronger sense. Following the fixed, standardized procedures for how academic research should be related to the context of justification hampers this aim for two reasons.

One is that the standard formats involve *criteria* for selecting valid knowledges, as epitomized by references to relevance, validity, reliability, and generalizability inherent to the format. Hence, communication from outside the academic discourse becomes exceedingly difficult. The force of this is palpable in the tremor most students (including those well versed in ethnography) feel when they have to rely on the knowledge of their respondents or on their own observation which therefore often end up relegated to the annexe. But it is also the fate those

trying to introduce new kinds of knowledges. The fate of early feminist thinking in security studies is exemplary in this regard (before it became part of the mainstream). 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 Cynthia Enloe’s (among others) to formulate arguments and especially titles that answered these questions were therefore of crucial importance in reforming and altering the fixed standardized format of research communication in security studies (see Enloe, 2007, , 2000, , 1994, , 1990). Enloe effectively intervened and refashioned the debate, “diffracting” the understanding of security. However, she did this *against* the fixed and standardized criteria. She did it as an academic voice well versed in security studies and international relations and as an usually eloquent one capable of twisting the criteria into speaking 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 characteristics. This is hardly an objective way of dealing with knowledge but a highly subjective one, strongly biased towards academic knowledge.

The other and related reason fixed conventions for academic research presentation often make it exceedingly difficult to communicate multiple knowledge is the restrictions imposed on *the forms* of communication. The data of ethnographic research is a heterogeneous mixture that may involve things like talk, observation, images, sounds, emotions, and (why not) smells. Presenting this data is therefore also often best done (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) and the academic / theoretical runs uninterruptedly on the other (e.g. the even pages). Other scholars rely on images, extracts from web-conversations, film-making, theatre or novel writing for the communication of their ideas. Even if these formats have made their way into the standard formats for academic international relations, as demonstrated by their presence on the program of the International Studies Association Convention (Hozic, 2013, Edikins, 2012), they are still alien to fixed formats of most security studies journals<sup>7</sup> who hesitate to . The consequence is that ECSS find themselves in a situation where they have to present their research result without including their “data” directly. The analogy would be the quantitative researcher having to communicate research without including the numbers on the basis of which conclusions were reached. This partial form of communication can hardly be said to favour objectivity. Nor of course does the exclusion of essential forms of data more generally.

When ECSS depart from the fixed criteria and formats it is in other words *not* because they fail to understand objectivity. It is precisely because they have a more solid understanding what objective presentation of research data entails. Not to bias it against (or make it impossible) to capture the multiplicity of knowledges beyond the scholarly scientific community requires a more flexible understanding of what the criteria for valid knowledge are and forms of presentation that make it possible to convey research results based on the related research.

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<sup>7</sup> Obvious exceptions include *Alternatives, International Political Sociology and Security Dialogue*.

## Researcher Engagement in Selective Translations

A concern with improving objectivity also informs the predilection of ECSS to positively value the personal and emotional engagement of the researcher in the process of presenting results. For ethnographers the presentation of the research result can never be a matter of “reporting”. The material is bound to always be too large and complex for this to be an option. Even when space is created for rendering the multiplicity and contradictions of the social world, the researcher has to decide which aspects to include in the account. More than this in the process of making the account s/he is in fact creating the research object as it will be rendered to the context of justification. The research in other words makes choices about how s/he wants to translate. Viewed from an ECSS angle, unengaged reporting is therefore not an option. It can at best serve as a fig-leaf covering unreflected choices and the associated biases. Aspiring to objectivity in the research process therefore demands making the researcher’s personal and emotional engagement 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 request that information about them should be 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 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 just because someone requested this. In war/conflict situations, such as those dealt with by Nordstrom, the stakes involved are high. But also when the stakes are lesser, ethnographers would find it important the researchers demonstrate that they have engaged enough to make informed choices about how and what to translate from their research. The consequence is sophisticated discussions about whether or not and how to engage in conflict contexts (e.g. Zehfuss, 2012). This visible and preferably explicitly reflected upon engagement of the research in the presentation of research results does not hamper objectivity. It is a necessity if research is not to be biased against or even physically harm (some of the) the observed.

For analogous reasons the emotional engagement of the researcher in research presentation is considered to bolster objectivity in ECSS. Part of the reason, is that emotions have often played a core role in motivating research. Hence being explicit and reflexive both about their presence in framing research (as civic anger fashions critical research Silber, 2011) and their consequences (Pupavac, 2004) is important for an “objective” rendering of the research results. However, at least as 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 scholars would even side with Bourdieu insists, without engagement and emotion one might as well give up on the idea of communicating an understanding of the observed (Bourdieu, 1999: 614). Sylvester 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, 2012, , 2011). Sylvester's arguments are focussed on the potential the emotional register opens for capturing a diversity of knowledges. The implication of this view is that drawing on emotions has the potential to strengthen the objectivity of communication about research in International Relations generally and about war specifically. For ECSS "engagement", including emotional, is in other words a necessary and valuable part of the presentation of research results. Acknowledging this is necessary if unaccounted bias is not to make its way into the presentation. For ECSS, emotional engagement is a help (rather than a hinder) for objectivity of research.

In their approach to the presentation of data, as in the process of gathering and analysing it, ECSS insist on a research practice where procedures are flexible and the researcher engaged, including emotionally engaged, with the researched. As just underscored, the reason is not a disregard for objectivity but a wish to enhance it. Flexible procedures are necessary not to 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 chapter has insisted that Critical Security Studies has not only "enlarged the concept" of security but contributed to methodological discussions in the discipline. More specifically, it focussed on one very narrow and specific issue, namely the issue of what kinds of methods will bolster the objectivity scientific research. Following the basic steps (data gathering and presentation) taken by ethnographers working in critical security studies, the chapter traced their contributions to understanding objectivity. It suggested that they work with a more robust notion of objectivity that makes flexibility and personal/emotional engagement essential. It also highlighted that in so doing they were challenging standard understandings of objectivity as being enhanced by fixed procedures and disengaged researchers. The chapter 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 also in the most banal sides of research practice. This may seem to make references to objectivity entirely inappropriate. Are ECSS not "dodging" questions of "objectivity" altogether? They may not like the term much but they are not "dodging" the questions. ECSS (ethnography 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. To reiterate Harraway's eloquent formulation: "All that ... strong objectivity "dodge" 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." (Harraway, 1997: 37).

This argument about objectivity has been advanced drawing on ECSS in relation to the specific issues that arise because of the specific character of research there. However, as signalled at the outset it is of more general relevance. Bias and values are embedded also in the

elementary practices of other forms of research, the conventional “positivist” but also other forms CSS research (drawing on history, political theory or actor network theory e.g.<sup>8</sup>). This is easily forgotten. The field is not there to strike back. The “elementary research practices” can be safely kept from view behind walls of “ostentatious scientificity” or obscurantist radicalism (Bourdieu, 2012: 222). Forgetting cannot diminish the relevance of the issues raised by ECSS research with regard to objectivity even if it makes them less uncomfortable as they can be ignored and hence facilitate research business as usual. Indeed, if taken seriously, the ECSS insights about objective methods are uncomfortable precisely because they would demand a rethinking of standardized assumptions about good methods practice. This would involve reconsidering the instructions conveyed by methodological authorities at all levels (from student instructors to journal editors passing through research councils). But discomfort is often a good thing. In this case it could be an opportunity to improve the business as usual research practice in security studies by making a stronger objectivity integral to it. This is the challenge and contribution ECSS work offers security studies.

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<sup>8</sup> Harraway is indeed aiming her statement in both directions. It is formulated as part of a critique of Latour and work in actor network theory more generally.

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