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# The Increasing Insecurity of Security Studies: Conceptualizing Security in the Last Twenty Years

STEVE SMITH

This article reflects on the last 20 years of debates concerning the nature of security. Let me start by noting that I want to focus on the non-traditional literature; that is to say that I want to deal with what can be called 'new thinking' in security studies, as distinct from mainstream debates within the dominant realist paradigm. Before I review this 'new thinking', I want to make two preliminary points: one is an autobiographical one about the contrast between the discipline of security studies I joined as a lecturer over 20 years ago and its current character. The other, wider, point relates to the nature of the changes in the discipline of international relations during that same time.

What is to me quite amazing is just how much security studies has changed over 20 years. Let us start with the name of the sub-field: like many in the field, I was taught *strategic studies* at university, and I accepted the dominant assumptions of the time, namely that strategic studies was about the military relations between states; within this context, nuclear issues were dominant, reflecting both an unconscious ethnocentrism and a real fear of the consequences for humanity if nuclear 'stability' broke down. Today, our students study *security studies* with the concept of security defined far wider than before in both its referent objects and in its content. Looking back, what fascinates me is just how naturalized the world of strategic studies seemed, and I remember only too well the buzz that being a 'master of the universe' of nuclear matters gave me. It was very comforting to 'know' about CEPs, bias, ALCMs, SLCMs and GLCMs, and so on. One could pronounce from a position of security(!) about the 'facts' of the nuclear world. It was a world of clear parameters and established facts. If you served your apprenticeship and learnt the canon of the canon, then you could speak

with real authority about the (one) world out there. It never really crossed my mind that by teaching about this world in the (certain) way I did that I was part of the problem. I thought it was enough to be dedicated to showing the follies inherent in SDI or in MX or whatever. I never really thought that my actions were legitimizing those very moves by reinforcing this partitioning of human affairs. In short, I worked critically within the strategic studies community, and never questioned the 'givens' of that community.

It was only after a lengthy period of teaching the philosophy of social science and also of being involved in the fierce theoretical debates within the discipline of international relations that I realized that I was working within one social theoretical tradition, namely that of explanation (as distinct from understanding). It was only then that I began to see how I was taking the world as a given, and therefore doing what Robert Cox has called 'problem-solving theory'. The most political point of all was that I presented the world as having a set of given actors, structures and processes. In essence, I accepted the game (in the game theory sense of the word), and tried to work out how to lessen its dangers. Thus it was not simply a case of trying to be neutral or 'value-free', since I had my views on the big issues of the day. It was a far more insidious acceptance, namely that of seeing the way in which one studied security issues as essentially uncontentious. Even as I thought I was being 'radical' in the positions I was taking, I was none the less working within a theoretical worldview that took the strategic world as a world much like the natural world. Thus, my definitions of the social fabric of that world were determined by my epistemological assumptions. My epistemology, therefore, led not only to the methods I would use, but critically it also led to me defining the furniture of the social world in a very specific way. In true rational choice fashion, I accepted the definition of the game, and from this came the interests and identities of the actors, as well as the ways of knowing these, and the ways of focusing on how to achieve some game outcomes rather than others. I really felt I 'knew' this world, better than those peace activists who 'just didn't understand the way the world was', and better than those defence specialists who could not see how to get to more co-operative game theoretic outcomes. But this view was itself hostage to my naturalizing the social world.

What understanding as a social theory does, of course, is to redirect attention onto another form of game, this time in the Wittgensteinian sense of a form of life, in which we intersubjectively create our actors,

structures and processes. In this light strategic studies began to look like one story about the world, not the only, let alone the true, story. Twenty years on, the changes in the field are enormous. Of course, many still study the military aspects of security (and they must remain a central part of the field), but the entire area is far more 'essentially contested'. At the level of the actors involved, the most fundamental point is that the Janus-faced nature of the state has become much more accepted, as both a source of security and a source of insecurity for populations. Just as the state is problematized like never before, so, as I shall discuss below, are other actors the referent point of discussions about security. Similarly, while military concerns are still central to debates about security, there are a large number of other aspects of human activity than are now discussed as security issues. The concept of security has been both widened and deepened. But for me the biggest change has been that the security debate is no longer solely a debate about a world 'out there', a world that we are presented with and which is essentially unchanging over the centuries. Instead the debate about what counts as a security issue, and what counts as security, becomes itself a site or focal point for disputes between various power/knowledge interests. In this sense, the last 20 years has seen increasing insecurity in security studies and this is a change that I very much welcome. My main claim, then, is that the field is remarkably different to the field I started teaching 25 years ago. The intellectual bedfellows then were organization theory and economics; now they are more likely to be anthropology and cultural studies. Security studies is no longer something to be explained: it is also something to be understood, and this is a massive change of focus.

The second, and related, preliminary point concerns the changing nature of the discipline of international relations. Twenty years ago neorealism reached its zenith with the publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>1</sup> Strategic studies fitted neatly into this worldview. The central role accorded to structure in neorealism licensed strategic studies to focus on states and military security. Indeed, neorealism basically defined international relations in a way that was identical to the core assumptions of strategic studies. Note the way that Waltz was able to write about nuclear proliferation on the basis of his theory of international politics. International relations has changed in very important ways since then, and these clearly have impacted on security studies. The most significant change has been that neorealism is no longer predominant. Despite many protestations to the contrary,

neorealism suffered massively because of its inability to cope with the end of the Cold War. Nor does it seem able to account for the patters of international conflict that have replaced the Cold War. In the last decade, the mainstream has become dominated by what Ole Wæver calls the 'neo-neo' synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

This synthesis is a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense of the word: it delineates the main questions to be asked and, crucially, what counts as answers to them. Despite the vigorous debate between neorealism and neoliberalism in the (mainly US) literature, the two positions are in fact very close both in their view of the world, and in how to study it. I am not denying the importance of the debate over, say, the importance of relative as opposed to absolute gains, or of the question of whether international institutions can mitigate the effects of anarchy; but both sides of the 'neo-neo synthesis' see essentially the same world, and have no important differences over how to study it. The classic example is the work of Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein on the role of ideas in international relations: Keohane and Goldstein argue that their view is a challenge to both rationalist (the neo-neo synthesis) and reflectivist (postmodern, critical theory and feminist) positions, but their view of the role of ideas is very much as an add-on to a rationalist worldview.<sup>3</sup> Ideas, then, are really intervening variables, and the primary motivating factors remain state interests. This is a very different view to the role of ideas in the reflectivist, and more recently the constructivist, literatures, where ideas construct both interests and identities.

The main area of agreement between both sides of the neo-neo synthesis concerns the theory of knowledge. I will not discuss this in depth, although I believe that this is of fundamental importance. All I will say is that neorealists and neoliberals are essentially 'explainers', seeing the goal as a social science of international relations. This is best expressed in one quote from Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane and Stephen Krasner's introductory essay in the special 50th anniversary edition of *International Organization*. Arguing that the main debate in the literature is that between rationalism and sociological approaches, they distinguish three variants of the latter: conventional, critical and postmodern. They broadly accept the legitimacy of the first two of these categories but argue that: 'In contrast to conventional and critical constructivism, postmodernism falls clearly outside of the social science enterprise, and in international relations research it risks becoming self-referential and disengaged from the world, protests to the contrary

notwithstanding.<sup>4</sup> For these three writers the journal *International Organization* has not published postmodernist work, because the journal 'has been committed to an enterprise that postmodernism denies: the use of evidence to adjudicate between truth claims'.<sup>5</sup> This epistemological orthodoxy is the core reason for the overlap between neorealism and neoliberalism being so large that they constitute a research paradigm.

The current theoretical picture is one of a rationalist mainstream dominating the study of international relations, and being predominant in the United States. Opposing this are two broad schools of thought, reflectivist approaches and social constructivism. The former is more united by what it disagrees with than with what it proposes, and comprises a range of approaches, with three main focal points: gender/feminist theory, postmodernism and critical theory. These approaches have two things in common: a reaction against the rationalist world view, and a dissatisfaction with the dominance of positivism (explaining) within the mainstream. Social constructivism, centring on the work of writers such as John Ruggie, Alexander Wendt, Michael Barnett, Fritz Kratochwil and Nick Onuf, is emerging as the main competitor to rationalist accounts. Its core claim, that the structures and processes of international relations are indeed social constructions (in the memorable words of Alexander Wendt, 'anarchy is what states make of it'), is relatively easily combined with rationalism's assumptions of the role of ideas. Thus Alexander Wendt's magnum opus, *Social Theory of International Politics*, is an attempt to construct a middle way between rationalism and reflectivism, siding with rationalism on epistemological grounds, but with reflectivism on ontological grounds.<sup>6</sup> In my view, social constructivism is very much closer to rationalism than it is to reflectivism, and I think that the new 'great debate' within the discipline of international relations will be between social constructivism and rationalism, centering on the role of ideas, and thereby the relationship between the material and the ideational in world politics.

Compared to 20 years ago, the current situation is very different in terms of the dominance of neorealism. In my view, neorealism is now far less influential both in security studies and in the discipline of international relations more generally. The new consensus focuses on issues omitted by neorealism, and of these the role of the ideational is of critical importance. The range of actors dealt with, and the range of issues covered in the study of international relations, is now far broader

than 20 years ago. Crucially, the central assumptions of neorealism, that the state was the key actor in world politics and that the main, almost defining, issue for the discipline was military security, are now less central to the discipline. The focus can be as much on deaths by poverty as on deaths by weapons and war. The state is no longer the only or core actor, and as a result it is less privileged than before. The concept of security is more widely defined than before, and thus the sub-field of security studies is more intellectually exciting than the old sub-field of strategic studies ever was. Above all there is an intellectual eclecticism about security studies specifically, and international relations generally, that stands in marked contrast to the 'separate' and authoritative discipline that I was taught and, in turn, taught.

#### THE LAST 20 YEARS OF TRADITIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

I shall now turn to look at what I consider to be some of the main developments in the literature on security studies over the last 20 years. I shall start with the work that is in my view closest to the realist core of the discipline, and move towards those approaches that are nowadays classed as post-positivist or reflectivist. It would be very misleading of me to imply that there was not soul-searching as to the utility of traditional realist assumptions about security. I shall mention two important mainstream discussions, one consisting of papers written before the end of the Cold War, a second consisting of papers written after it. In the first group, the starting point was the 1983 paper by Richard Ullman 'Redefining Security'.<sup>7</sup> In this article, Ullman questioned the utility of focusing on military security, since it 'conveys a profoundly false image of reality ... it causes states to concentrate on military threats and to ignore other and perhaps even more harmful dangers. Thus it reduces their total security. And second, it contributes to a pervasive militarization of international relations that in the long run can only increase global insecurity'.<sup>8</sup> Although Ullman's argument was very much couched in terms of the needs of the US state, it nonetheless was an early statement of the need to redefine security so as to involve issues such as population growth and resource scarcity.

A second contribution was the 1988 paper by Joseph Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones, reporting on a conference on the future of security studies held at Harvard in 1987.<sup>9</sup> They saw five main weaknesses in the field of security studies:

- There had been little theoretical innovation since the 1960s.
- US security studies reflected a preoccupation with current policy fads.
- As a result of the previous point, it was difficult to establish security studies in universities, leaving rival foundations to finance ‘beltway bandits’ whose work represented the industrialization of security studies.
- The dominance of the US in the field results in ethnocentrism.
- There was a severe shortage of good data, and a need to develop a proper history of the post-1945 era.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, there was the important 1989 article by Jessica Tuchman Mathews, also called ‘Redefining Security’, in which she put forward a strong case for redefining security so as to deal with environmental issues: ‘Global developments now suggest the need for ... [a] ... broadening definition of national security to include resource, environmental and demographic issues.’<sup>11</sup> This argument was strongly opposed by Dan Deudney in a 1990 paper in which he argued that ‘If we begin to speak about all the forces and events that threaten life, property and well-being (on a large scale) as threats to our national security, we shall soon drain the term of any meaning. All large-scale evils will become threats to national security.’<sup>12</sup>

After the end of the Cold War there have been a number of important articles looking at the changing nature of international security. The first was by Helga Haftendorn in 1991.<sup>13</sup> In this article Haftendorn called for security studies to concentrate on much more than the traditional focus on the military security of the state, and include economic, ecological and domestic aspects of security. The field of security studies needed to develop a common understanding of what security was. This would require US scholars to move out of their preoccupation with strategic studies, and European scholars to move beyond peace studies. Haftendorn called for a truly international security studies.

Probably the most widely cited article published just after the end of the Cold War was Stephen Walt’s review of the ‘renaissance’ in security studies.<sup>14</sup> Walt argues that starting in the mid-1970s, security studies began a ‘dramatic resurgence’, in which it became ‘more rigorous, methodologically sophisticated, and theoretically inclined ... competing views were increasingly based on systematic social scientific research rather than on unverified assertions or arguments by authority’.<sup>15</sup> But



Walt was concerned about the expansion of security studies to encompass non-military issues such as the environment, poverty and economics: 'Defining the field in this way would destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions to any of these important problems.'<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, in terms of my earlier comments about the importance of epistemological assumptions, Walt makes two important claims. First, that the 'heart' of security studies should be the study of war; second, that his survey would only include those works that meet 'the standards of logic and evidence in the social sciences'.<sup>17</sup> Thus for Walt, the main focus of security studies is the 'phenomenon of war ... security studies may be defined as *the study of the threat, use, and control of military force* ... most of it fits comfortably within the familiar realist paradigm ... and tends to address phenomena that can be controlled by national leaders'.<sup>18</sup> Edward Kolodziej, in a strong critique of Walt's analysis, argues that it is precisely the definition of the social sciences that does much of the work in Walt's survey of security studies: 'the essay's philosophically restrictive notion of the social sciences would confine the security scholar to testing propositions largely specified by state power brokers, policymakers and managers of violence. The latter decide what is real, relevant and controllable; the security scholar ... is then relegated to the subservient task of assessing the feasibility of policy proposals generated elsewhere.'<sup>19</sup> For Kolodziej, Walt's security studies is far too limited in its content, and crucially is trapped within a neorealist logic of international anarchy and a positivist notion of scholarly standards.

More recently, David Baldwin, Richard Betts and Lawrence Freedman have each examined the status of security studies.<sup>20</sup> For Baldwin, the end of the Cold War required a return to older notions of security than those which dominated the last decades of the Cold War: 'In sum, the field of security studies seems poorly equipped to deal with the post-Cold War world, having emerged from the Cold War with a narrow military conception of national security ... Its preoccupation with military statecraft limits its ability to address the many foreign and domestic problems that are not amenable to military security.'<sup>21</sup> For Betts, 'A specter is haunting strategic studies – the specter of peace.'<sup>22</sup> He sees this as threatening the study of strategic studies in universities, and concludes that 'War has always been an essential phenomenon in world politics. There is nothing wrong with asserting that it is waning as long as such propositions (which have been popularized and discredited three

times before in the past century) are not allowed to strike the issue from the agenda of highest priority problems.<sup>23</sup> Freedman traces the transition from strategic studies to security studies after the mid-1970s, seeing two events as undermining confidence in the former, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the implosion of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. These events both undermined the predictive power of the old strategic studies, with the latter removing the problem strategic studies was meant to deal with. The result was 'a mass exodus from arms control to ethnic conflict, requiring practitioners to pay more attention to the softer social sciences such as anthropology'.<sup>24</sup> But in redefining security so broadly, Freedman sees a danger of the field 'losing all focus'.<sup>25</sup> Instead he proposes a 'realist revival', which would 'assert the conditionality of the most progressive developments and the fragility of long-established institutions when under stress, keeping in mind how human relations can turn vicious in short order ... The underlying purpose of a realist revival would not be to peddle despondency for its own sake but to challenge complacency, sustaining an awareness of the dark side of international affairs to encourage measures that protect and promote the light.'<sup>26</sup>

#### THE NON-TRADITIONAL LITERATURE

These discussions of the standing of security studies show that there is a strong argument that the core assumptions of the field should not be undermined by redefining security and by widening its content. I now want to turn to more radical assessments of the status of security studies, and I will look at seven main areas of developments in the non-traditional literature. As mentioned above, I will start with the work that fits most closely with the traditional literature and then move to more radical perspectives.

##### *Alternative Defence and Common Security*

The work in this 'school' has tended to be more concentrated in policy-related reports than in publications in the traditional academic literature. Launched most famously via Gorbachev's 'new thinking', but having its origins in the Palme Commission report in 1982, the main focus has been how to increase common/collective/co-operative/comprehensive security (with security defined in terms of state security).<sup>27</sup> The core concern has been how to make states more secure

without increasing levels of insecurity for other states, and in all of this it was the superpower confrontation that assumed greatest importance. As Olaf Palme put it in the preface to the 1982 report: 'Our alternative is common security. There can be no hope of victory in a nuclear war, the two sides would be united in suffering and destruction. They can survive only together. They must achieve security not against the adversary but together with him. International security must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on a threat of mutual destruction.'<sup>28</sup> This thinking led to a variety of proposals by social movements (such as the 'nuclear freeze' movement in the US, and CND/END in the UK/Europe) and semi-official bodies, all on the lines of how to achieve alternative defence or common security.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, despite the great contribution made by these reports to debates about security in the 1980s they were very much a product of the second Cold War, and thus very focused on the superpower conflict. The aim was to improve state security, and this was largely, although not exclusively, defined in military terms. Perhaps the major contributions of this 'school' were to question the orthodoxies of Western defence policies, and to challenge the traditional conception of the strategic 'expert'. I well remember the challenge represented by all these citizen groups who 'simply didn't understand the way the world was'. Well, whatever the limitations of their focus on the state and on the superpower conflict, they did delegitimize the traditional security agenda, and contributed considerably to the pressure to wind down the Cold War. Nonetheless this was a debate within the parameters of how developed states should pursue military security.

#### THE THIRD WORLD SECURITY SCHOOL

This 'school' emerged during the Cold War and explicitly took the perspective of the weaker/poorer states of the world. One of the first major statements was Caroline Thomas' 1987 book *In Search of Security*, in which she argued for a far more extensive definition of security than that usually found in the mainstream literature.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, Thomas sees Third World states as insecure not only because of military factors, but primarily because of 'the relative weakness, the lack of autonomy, the vulnerability and the lack of room for manoeuvre which Third World states have on economic, political and of course military levels'.<sup>31</sup> Similar points were made by Rob Walker in his 1988 statement of the main

themes of the Committee for a Just World Peace.<sup>32</sup> More generally, this 'school' criticized the realist notion of the state that dominated traditional security studies: this model was simply inappropriate to the situation in the Third World/South, where there was not the same level of social cohesion. Thus, whereas for Western states threats to security are mainly external, for states in the Third World/South threats are mainly internal, and to the extent that they are external they are more economic and environmental than military in nature. In this sense there was a direct relationship between security and development. Therefore, whereas the traditional literature saw Third World security in terms of how it affected the bipolar Cold War relationship, and assumed that the priority was to preserve the *status quo*, Third World security writers saw this very *status quo* as a major source of insecurity.

Having said which, writers in this 'school' continued to place the state at the centre of their analysis, and this, of course, raised the problem that for many in the Third World/South the state was in fact a major source of insecurity for populations. In this light the work of Mohammed Ayoob is of considerable importance. In a series of publications, Ayoob has criticized the mainstream definition of security in two main ways.<sup>33</sup> First, neither traditional nor post-Cold War conceptions of security captured the predicaments of Third World states; second, these predicaments were inextricably linked to the process of state formation in these relatively new states. Ayoob's focus is very much on national elites rather than on their populations, and therefore he defines security in terms of how state structures, institutions and state-building will be affected. Thus for Ayoob, the state is the least worst option for overcoming the security predicament of the Third World.

There have been a number of major critiques of Ayoob's work. In a sympathetic but incisive review Keith Krause argues that there are three main problems with Ayoob's work: first, that Ayoob is not clear as to what exactly is to be explained. He wants to explain the main concerns of Third World elites but rarely gives examples of these. Put simply are these concerns to do with external or internal security? Second, Ayoob conflates state and regime, and this, for Krause, is a major area of confusion, since these are two very different analytical foci. Finally, Ayoob has a very narrow conception of the political, 'one that privileges the state without even raising the question of whether or not it should be the proper *subject* of security'.<sup>34</sup> This focus on the state is, for Krause, the

central problem of Ayoob's work, since it involves both a teleological assumption that Third World states need to follow the Western model of state development to overcome their insecurities, and also it overlooks the fact that many of the major threats to security in the Third World are from governments towards individuals and communal groups. In short, exactly what is the security threat that Ayoob focuses on, and are the perceptions of elites the best starting place?

#### BUZAN AND THE 'COPENHAGEN SCHOOL'

It is difficult to overestimate the contribution to the widening of the debate about international security made by the work of Barry Buzan and his collaborators (most notably Ole Wæver) in what Bill McSweeney has dubbed the 'Copenhagen school'.<sup>35</sup> As Ken Booth has argued, Buzan's 1983 book *People, States and Fear*<sup>36</sup> 'remains the most comprehensive theoretical analysis of the concept [of security] in international relations literature to date, and since its publication the rest of us have been writing footnotes to it'.<sup>37</sup> The key move made by Buzan in this book was to broaden the security agenda so as to involve five sectors rather than the traditional focus on only one of these, military security. To this, Buzan added political, economic, societal and ecological security sectors. These new sectors needed to be discussed because of changes in the policy environment facing states in the 1980s. Importantly, Buzan also discussed the individual as the 'irreducible base unit' for discussions about security. But, for Buzan, individuals could not be the referent object for the analysis of international security. That had to be the state for three reasons: it was the state that had to cope with the sub-state, state, international security problematic; the state was the primary agent for the alleviation of insecurity; and the state was the dominant actor in the international political system. In this sense, Buzan sought to widen the definition of security to encompass five sectors, and to focus discussions about security on three levels (the sub-state, the state and the international system). But in all of this the state was the referent object, as it is the state that stands at the interface between security dynamics at the sub-state level, and the security dynamics operating at the level of the international system. As such, despite the widening of the definition of security, Buzan presents what is a sophisticated neorealist account of security. He has been criticized by, among others, Richard Wyn Jones, for his focus on the state and for his

quest for scientific objectivity. As Wyn Jones notes, the book should really have been entitled *States and Fear*.<sup>38</sup> For Buzan, however, strategic studies had become a sub-set of security studies, dealing with issues of military technology and the use of force.<sup>39</sup>

Ken Booth and I both wrote critically about Buzan's focus on the state as the referent object for security studies, preferring instead a focus on the individual.<sup>40</sup> Booth argued that the state was not the primary referent for security for three reasons: 'states are unreliable as primary referents because whereas some are in the business of security (internal and external) some are not'; 'even those which are producers of security (internal and external) represent the means and not the ends'; and 'states are too diverse in their character to serve as the basis for a comprehensive theory of security'.<sup>41</sup> In place of the state, Booth wants to place human emancipation at the centre of security studies: 'The litmus test concerns the primary referent object: is it states, or is it people? Whose security comes first? I want to argue ... that individual humans are the ultimate referent.'<sup>42</sup> Martin Shaw criticized Booth for this focus on the individual, arguing instead that society is 'the missing dimension' of security studies, with the concept of social relations needing to 'be interposed between and around the terms "state" and "individual"'.<sup>43</sup> For Shaw, both state and individual need to be understood within a sociological context, and neither seen as standing alone.

By the early 1990s, the massive changes in European security meant that it was difficult for Buzan to maintain his view that the state was the referent object for security. In a series of publications with Ole Wæver, he developed the notion of 'societal security' as the most effective way of understanding the emerging security agenda in post-Cold War Europe.<sup>44</sup> This shift was a very important one. Whereas state security focuses on sovereignty as the core value, societal security focused instead on identity, as represented in the ability of a society to maintain its traditional patterns of language, culture, religious and national identity and customs. For Buzan and Wæver, societal security should not replace a focus on state security but should be more at the centre of analysis, since it was societal security issues that seemed far more relevant to the debates of the 1990s than were the old state security ones: there was 'a duality of state security and societal security, the former having sovereignty as its ultimate criterion, and the latter being held together by concerns about identity'.<sup>45</sup> Prominent among these were issues such as migration which simply could not be fitted into the state security debate.

Crucial in this move towards societal security has been Ole Wæver's work on the idea of 'securitization'.<sup>46</sup> For Wæver, security is best understood as a discursive act, as a speech act. By this he means that labelling something as a security issue imbues it with a sense of importance and urgency that legitimizes the use of special measures outside of the usual political process to deal with it. Wæver is concerned that this results in a militarized and confrontational mind-set, which defines security questions in an 'us versus them' manner. Instead Wæver proposes 'desecuritizing' issues, that is, remove them from the security agenda. Thus, for the Copenhagen 'school' the centre of analysis is 'the practice of securitization'.<sup>47</sup> In the most recent Copenhagen 'school' book, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde define the focus as follows: 'securitization studies aims to gain an increasingly precise understanding of who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent objects), why, with what results, and, not least, under what conditions (that is, what explains when securitization is successful)'.<sup>48</sup> A successful securitization attempt requires that the actor has the position of authority to make the securitizing claim, that the alleged threats facilitate securitization and that the securitizing speech act follows the grammar of security. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde then relate this securitization approach to the five sectors outlined by Buzan back in 1983, and to a regional, rather than a state, focus on security.

The work of the Copenhagen 'school' has sparked considerable debate. The main critique has come from Bill McSweeney who makes three main criticisms of their work.<sup>49</sup> First, they conceive of society and identity as objectivist: 'Society is conceived as a social fact, with the same objectivity and ontological status as the state.'<sup>50</sup> Second, following from this they misunderstand the nature of identity: 'Who we are is not a matter of fact imposed on individuals who "belong" to the "society" of Wæver *et al.* Their idea of a collective identity as a social fact projects the image of a collective self to be discovered: we are who we are.'<sup>51</sup> Third, McSweeney argues that they are wrong to see society as embodying the one value of identity as the only object of vulnerability relevant to security analysis. Rather, disagreements about identity are normative, not objective. McSweeney also notes that there is a discontinuity between the focus of Wæver and Buzan's work and Buzan's earlier work on security: in *People, States and Fear*, Buzan, breaking with realist assumptions, had introduced the domestic environment by arguing for the need for strong states which would result in a mature anarchy of

security communities (a move that introduced change at the international level). This would be a more secure international system. As McSweeney notes, 'The problem, then, is to understand how the identity thesis is compatible with Buzan's security theory. The concept of a strong state rested on the subordination of society to the state. Now, in Wæver *et al.* the state is no longer the uniquely privileged actor ... If society is now an independent variable, no longer subordinate to the state, then it appears that the Copenhagen school has undermined Buzan's original thesis.'<sup>52</sup>

Buzan and Wæver responded to this critique,<sup>53</sup> and McSweeney replied in turn.<sup>54</sup> The core of their disagreement concerns the objectivist nature of identity, with Buzan and Wæver arguing that their approach to identity was pragmatic not objectivist. Nonetheless they claimed that over time certain characteristics remain unchanged and thus these become socially sedimented and can be taken as a given. McSweeney fundamentally disagrees with this, and claims that identity can only ever be understood as a process – it does not sediment, and cannot be taken as a given. And, whereas Buzan and Wæver do not see a contradiction between the work of Buzan on the state and the focus of the Copenhagen school on identity and societal security, McSweeney maintains that 'Buzan has pulled the rug from under his earlier thesis ... Identity figured in this schema as an element of the domestic sphere under the control of the state. Now identity figures as a potential rival to the state, generated outside its control, and standing with the state as an equal priority for security concern and policy.'<sup>55</sup> Jef Huysmans has also assessed the work of the Copenhagen school.<sup>56</sup> After reviewing its main features (definition of security, multiple security sectors, regional security dynamics) he argues that it is Euro-centric, not so much in its focus of study, but more in the fact that its underlying argument about the logic of security is a culturally specific one.

In my view, the work of the Copenhagen school is one of the most interesting developments in the contemporary study of security. While it is true that there are clear tensions between the positions of the two main members, Buzan's neorealism and Wæver's poststructural realism, it is nonetheless the case that some really innovative work is going on here. The members are to be admired for working together and trying to see how they can develop accounts of security, albeit from different starting points. Specifically, I find the intersection between Wæver's work on securitization and Buzan's focus on system structure to be



compatible, since each can agree that, in the contemporary international system, securitization is overwhelmingly carried out in a realist way. I do see some conflict between the joint foci of societal security and the state, but there is no doubt that the school, via its clear research programme, has been carrying out work that is far more innovative than anything in the mainstream of the subject.

#### CONSTRUCTIVIST SECURITY STUDIES

By constructivist security studies I mean the work of those writers who have brought the assumptions of social constructivism into security studies. I will focus on two examples of this work. The first is the edited collection of Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, *Security Communities*.<sup>57</sup> In this collection, the editors combine Karl Deutsch's work on security communities with social constructivism. They quickly move to distinguish their approach from poststructuralism, and see social constructivism as 'well-suited to consider how social processes and an international community might transform security politics'.<sup>58</sup> The central theme is that security communities are best understood as path-dependent and socially constructed, with the trigger mechanisms for security communities having both material and normative bases. Thus they believe that: 'A constructivist approach, which recognizes the importance of knowledge for transforming international structures and security politics, is best suited to taking seriously how international community can shape security politics and create the conditions for a stable peace.'<sup>59</sup> The important insight that this volume develops is that state actors might see security as achievable through community rather than through power. Security, therefore, is something that can be *constructed*; insecurity is not simply the 'given' condition of the international system. Security is what states make it.

The other major volume developing a constructivist account of international security is Peter Katzenstein's *The Culture of National Security*.<sup>60</sup> Katzenstein presents the volume as one written by International Relations scholars 'rummaging in the "graveyard" of sociological studies'.<sup>61</sup> The central theme of the book is that national 'security interests are defined by actors who respond to cultural factors. This does not mean that power, conventionally understood as material capabilities, is unimportant for an analysis of national security ... but the meanings that states and other political actors attach to power and

security help us explain their behavior.<sup>62</sup> Despite the arguments for broadening security studies, the Katzenstein volume looks at the social determinants of 'a traditional, narrow definition of security studies'.<sup>63</sup> This is because the editor sees this as a hard test of the use of cultural explanations. This test, however, is to be undertaken according to the dominant epistemological and thus methodological rules, and thus cultural explanations compete with those of liberalism and realism.

Note that for all the focus on identity, norms and culture in this volume, the state is still the actor, and military security remains the form of security to be explained. All of this is to be undertaken using the traditional forms of analysis. I find this last point to be absolutely crucial, since it means that there is an enormous limitation on the form of investigation that can be carried out. Despite the fact that these two volumes deal with culture and identity, they do so in such a way as to produce a very restricted notion of these phenomena. Not surprisingly, in a concluding chapter to the Katzenstein volume, Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro argue that the focus on norms, culture and identity essentially do no more than to 'fill gaps where other perspectives fall short'.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, social constructivist security studies tends to be open to the same criticisms as social constructivism generally, namely that it is essentially a form of rationalism, that it focuses on states, and that it is essentially social scientific (in the 'Explanation' sense of the word). It uses terms that are also found in poststructuralism, feminist theory and critical theory (terms such as identity and culture), but it can only conceive of these as causal variables, rather than constitutive ones. They are phenomena that apply to pre-existing (anthropomorphized) actors, rather than things that constitute those actors. The clearest indicator of this is the way in which social constructivist writers on security studies wish to distance themselves from poststructuralism and other 'Parisian' social theories.<sup>65</sup>

#### CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES

Critical security studies is the most sustained and coherent critique of traditional security studies. The dispute between these two perspectives is often fought out in debates over whether courses should be called security or strategic studies. Having said which, it is important to note that there are considerable differences within this broad approach. They are united more by perceived defects in the orthodoxy than by any

particular alternative vision. There are two main schools of thought under this general heading.

The first is that of Keith Krause and Michael Williams. Their 1997 co-edited volume is self-consciously concerned with developing a critical security studies (as distinct from the critical security studies of the 'Welsh' school, discussed below).<sup>66</sup> Krause and Williams want to be theoretically inclusive in the sense of involving many different perspectives, all of which are outside the mainstream, but which together do not add up to one view, let alone a critical view (in the Frankfurt School sense of the term). Their notion of 'critical' is derived from Robert Cox's distinction between problem solving and critical theories. The former takes the existing social and political relations and institutions as the given starting point for analysis and then sees how the problems arising from these can be solved or ameliorated; the latter enquires into how these 'given' relationships and institutions came into existence, and how they might be changed. Specifically, they want to *question the focus of traditional security studies on the state, and to deconstruct prevailing claims about security*. The editors admit that 'The reconstructive agenda of critical security studies is more difficult to discern at this point.'<sup>67</sup> Krause and Williams are not convinced that there is a new grounding for this reconstructive project, hence the volume has a wide variety of approaches and positions in its separate chapters, from subaltern realist (Ayooob), through fallen realist (Ken Booth), to postmodernist (Rob Walker/Simon Dalby). These contributors are united on two counts: a shared dissatisfaction with orthodox security studies and a disillusionment with the 'expansionist' agenda brought about by the end of the Cold War. The volume has four main themes: first, to examine substantive as well as meta-theoretical issues; second, the need to rethink the nature of the political in security studies; third, to explore what it means to be critical in security studies; fourth, to begin to reconceptualize the political once the state has been problematized.

The second variant within critical security studies is what can be termed the Welsh School.<sup>68</sup> This is based on the pioneering work of Ken Booth<sup>69</sup> and Richard Wyn Jones<sup>70</sup> at Aberystwyth. The 'critical' here is decidedly critical, since the intellectual inspirations are the works of Gramsci and the Frankfurt School. For both Booth and Wyn Jones, there is not only an explicit dissatisfaction with the statism and scientism of the orthodoxy, but there is also a very clear view of how to reconceptualize security studies: it is to be focused on human

emancipation. Only a process of emancipation can make the prospect of security more likely. Booth sees emancipation as *not* being the following: it is not a universal timeless concept; it cannot be at the expense of others; and it is not synonymous with Westernization. Instead it has the following three roles: it is a philosophical anchorage; it is a strategic process; and it is a tactical goal.<sup>71</sup> For Booth, emancipation 'offers a theory of progress for politics, it provides a politics of hope and it gives guidance to a politics of resistance ... emancipation is the only permanent hope of becoming'.<sup>72</sup> Emancipation is explicitly linked to critical theory: 'The next stage of thinking about security in world affairs should be marked by moving it out of its almost exclusively realist framework into the critical philosophical camp.'<sup>73</sup> As such, this variant of critical security studies offers both a powerful critique of the orthodoxy and a clear alternative foundation for thinking about security. In one sense it is a part of the wider critical security studies of Krause and Williams, but in another it is a more coherent and focused conception. Of course, that fact opens it up to criticism by those who do not accept the focus on human emancipation, and by those who disagree with Booth and Wyn Jones' Western conception of emancipation. Having said which, it is particularly interesting to note that Booth and Vale<sup>74</sup> have applied this framework to Southern Africa, and Booth and Trood have run a project on security in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>75</sup>

Critical security studies, certainly in its capital 'C' Welsh variant, offers a clear alternative focus for security studies to that offered by the mainstream. It is explicit in its values and in its view of the purposes of studying security. The Krause/Williams variant offers a much wider perspective on security studies, but of course whilst the advantage of this is a wide-ranging critique of the traditional literature, the price is that there is less likelihood of an agreement on how to reconceptualize security. The Welsh school of critical security studies offers a very different focus to that of either social constructivism or the Copenhagen school, with the former concentrating on the state and the latter on state/society. It makes absolutely clear that emancipation is the goal of studying security, and it is this explicit normative focus that attracts criticism from those who believe that security studies should be objective and merely report on the world from a neutral vantage point. Like poststructural critics of the orthodoxy, adherents of critical security studies deny the very possibility of such a vantage point, meaning that all viewpoints involve normative commitments.

## FEMINIST SECURITY STUDIES

Feminist work on security is extensive, although much of it deals with security implicitly as a result of a thorough-going critique of the gendered assumptions of traditional international relations. The central move, of course, is that feminists argue that international relations is axiomatically gendered in its consequences, and in the forms of identities and subjectivities it constitutes, and yet the discipline is gender-blind. Indeed, feminist international relations shows how women are ignored yet centrally implicated in international relations, whilst work on gender indicates the kinds of gendered identities (for both men and women) constituted by the processes of world politics.

Ann Tickner has argued that while security has always been considered a masculine issue, 'women have seldom been recognized by the security literature; yet women have been writing about security since at least the beginning of the century'.<sup>76</sup> As Tickner notes, clearly there are security issues that more directly affect women than men: 80–90 per cent of casualties of war are civilians, the majority of these being women and children; the rape of women is commonly used as a tool of war; over 80 per cent of the world's refugees are women and children; domestic violence against women is higher in militarized societies.<sup>77</sup> If the definition of security is broadened from one centred on the military dimension to include economic and environmental dimensions, then women's insecurity is even further highlighted: 'while women represent half the global population and one-third of the paid labour force and are responsible for two-thirds of all working hours, they receive only a tenth of world income and own less than one per cent of world property'.<sup>78</sup> Tickner's conclusion is that this evidence shows the fallacy of the view that the state is the guarantor of security for its citizens; crucially, the state is 'not neutral with regard to security provision for all individuals'.<sup>79</sup>

In her review of gender and international relations, Jill Steans notes the overlap between feminist and other critics of traditional security studies.<sup>80</sup> But what feminists add is a concern with 'what is lost from our understanding of security when gender is omitted'.<sup>81</sup> For Steans, gender alters our thinking about security not by (merely) adding new issues and different perspectives, but more by forcing us to reconceptualize security: 'Rethinking security, therefore, involves thinking about militarism and patriarchy, mal-development and environmental

degradation. It involves thinking about the relationship between poverty, debt and population growth. It involves thinking about resources and how they are distributed.<sup>82</sup>

There are four main strands to feminist security studies. First, there is the work of writers such as Cohn, and Cooke and Wollacott on the masculinized nature of the language used in strategic discourse.<sup>83</sup> Second is the work of writers such as Jean Elshtain and Nancy Hartsock who critique the conventional portrayal of the distinction between men and women as one of the 'just warrior' and the 'beautiful soul'; they note that these myths recreate the role of women as non-combatants and men as warriors.<sup>84</sup> Third, there is the focus on where women fit into international security. Here the work of Cynthia Enloe has been massively influential. Enloe asks the question 'where are the women?' and finds that they are implicated in international relations in fundamental ways. Only by showing where women fit into international relations can we understand how power really operates. Thus Enloe looks at the roles of women as prostitutes around military bases, at how masculinity gets constructed in the military, at the politics of how women soldiers are treated.<sup>85</sup> Finally, there is the work on the practical relationship between education, peace research and feminism. For example, Brock-Unte shows the linkages between militarism and sexism in society, and argues that both are maintained by a similar worldview, namely that men are inherently aggressive and women inherently non-violent, and that women are inferior.<sup>86</sup>

The contribution of feminist writers to security studies is in my view both considerable and ultimately destabilizing for the sub-field. This is because feminist work simply undermines the distinctions central to security studies traditionally conceived. Not only does much of this work subvert the notion of the state as neutral actor, but it also problematizes the identities of men and women by seeing masculinity both implicated in and constructed by the interrelated processes of militarism and patriarchy. Crucially, looking at security from the perspective of women alters the definition of what security is to such an extent that it is difficult to see how any form of traditional security studies can offer an analysis. Even without falling into the trap of seeing 'a' women's standpoint, there is nonetheless the obvious implication that traditional security studies is gender-blind and not gender-neutral. It is like looking at the world through completely different coloured spectacles, and I do not think that traditional security studies can

accommodate this challenge. And, of course, the more that gender is constructed (as distinct from assuming that there are pre-given and fixed female and male identities and natures) the more that practices (and thereby the study) of security become implicated in reinforcing these practices. Security studies therefore becomes part of the process of securitizing the state and supporting the gendered nature of international politics; this is far from the self-image of traditional strategic studies, which dealt with how to explain and manage a world of recurring patterns, motives and interests. Seeing these as gendered and as constructed implicates the study of security in the practice of security, and the resulting power/knowledge relationship is most certainly not one conducive to a naturalistic social science.

#### POSTSTRUCTURAL SECURITY STUDIES

Poststructural work on security represents even more of a challenge to traditional security studies than do any of the previous categories. Whereas all of them attempted to shift the focus of security studies so as to broaden the agenda and introduce new referent points, none of them so fundamentally challenges security studies as does poststructuralism. The reason for this is, of course, that poststructuralism does far more than disagree with the referent object and the content of security studies. Poststructuralists dispute the epistemological, methodological and ontological assumptions of traditional security studies (and of many of the variants discussed above) in the most basic way possible. It is for this reason that social constructivists and critical security studies writers are at such pains to establish the difference between their work and that of poststructuralists. Put simply, poststructuralists deny the form of foundations for knowledge claims that dominate the security studies debate. As can be imagined, this has led to much hostility towards poststructuralism in the discipline, usually along the lines that the work cannot be assessed using social science methods of scholarship. There simply are not the testable hypotheses and propositions that dominate traditional analysis, nor is there the same appeal to the 'truth' of a historical account or narrative. It is also important to point out that most of the alternative accounts discussed above would also have major disagreements with poststructuralism, since each of them (with the exception of some feminist work) holds on to the kind of epistemological foundationalism that poststructuralism denies. The dispute between,

say, the Welsh school of critical security studies, or social constructivist security studies and is a profound one.

It is, frankly, impossible to summarize the main themes of poststructuralist work because the picture of the world involved is so fundamentally different to that of the mainstream, and indeed most alternative approaches. A good discussion can be found in recent articles by Huysmans and Hansen.<sup>87</sup> What I will do is to point to two illustrative examples of work in this area. The first is the work of Bradley Klein, specifically his book *Strategic Studies and World Order: The Global Politics of Deterrence*.<sup>88</sup> Klein's aim is to look at strategic studies as a discourse closely allied to the processes of state formation and maintenance. Klein shows convincingly how the literature of strategic studies, far from being a neutral evaluation of the ineluctable condition of international anarchy, is instead a specific political move aimed at the defence of the state. As he puts it, 'what else is Strategic Studies about but the political-military defense of the state? ... strategic violence is less a function of the state than an instance of its own assertion ... an ongoing process of defining state boundaries'.<sup>89</sup> This view is informed by poststructuralist writings because they encourage 'an attitude of skepticism whenever certain key organizing principles are invoked'.<sup>90</sup> These principles, such as 'the states-system', 'the West', are, for Klein, cultural constructs 'made intelligible to social agents through the medium of language. Instead of presuming their existence and meaning, we ought to historicize and relativize them as sets of practices with distinct genealogical trajectories. The issue, in short, is not whether they are true or false but how they have acquired their meaning'.<sup>91</sup> Thus, for Klein, strategic studies itself is part of the process of defending the state, which is for him the very first question that should be posed: how do states capable of organizing violence emerge in the first place. 'Strategic Studies relies uncritically on what most needs explanation'.<sup>92</sup>

David Campbell has written some of the best empirical work in poststructuralist security studies. In his 1992 book *Writing Security*, he looks at how the practices of US foreign policy construct the identity of the US.<sup>93</sup> Instead of the usual survey of how external dangers threaten the US, 'this book offers a non-essentialist account of danger which highlights how the very domains of inside/outside, self/other, and domestic/foreign – these moral spaces made possible by the ethical borders of identity as much as the territorial boundaries of states – are constituted through the writing of a threat'.<sup>94</sup> Using Foucault's notion of



writing a 'history of the present', Campbell wants to trace how the rituals of US power develop over time. For Campbell, 'security ... is first and foremost a performative discourse constitutive of political order'.<sup>95</sup> The book traces the ways in which US foreign policy has served to articulate danger and difference to construct a specific identity for the US as an international actor. This identity is never fixed, and never final; it is always in the process of becoming and 'should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist ... Ironically, then, the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state's continued success'.<sup>96</sup> The bulk of the book consists of a series of discussions of how this identity of the US has been performed. The result is a very different account of state security, one that argues precisely against the consensus of the mainstream that state security policy is directed at protecting the state; rather, Campbell shows most effectively how that policy constitutes the identity of the state, the very thing that is the starting assumption for traditional approaches.

In a later book, *National Deconstruction*, Campbell offers an extremely interesting account of the Bosnian war using Levinas and Derrida to discuss the nature of responsibility to the Other.<sup>97</sup> Campbell argues that Levinas' work makes it impossible for anyone to say that the Bosnian war was not their concern. This is because Levinas' conception of responsibility towards the Other is not an add-on to already existing identities and subjectivities. Rather, 'subjects are constituted by their relationship with the Other'.<sup>98</sup> By reconfiguring subjectivity in this way, that is by making it an effect of the relationship with the Other, Levinas also reconfigures ethics. Thus, the war in Bosnia gives us a lack of choice, because ethics 'has been transformed from something independent of subjectivity – that is, from a set of rules and regulations adopted by pre-given, autonomous agents – to something insinuated within and integral to that subjectivity'.<sup>99</sup> Campbell argues that this form of thinking 'can help identify and energize the political ethos through which the development of a political life adequate to the complexities of Bosnia might be possible'.<sup>100</sup> Crucially, Campbell shows how a deconstructive approach *can* say something detailed about what to do in a case like Bosnia, and he argues powerfully that deconstructive thought allows politics to be politics rather than a 'predetermined technology or an undemocratic program hostile to the ethos of the Enlightenment'.<sup>101</sup>

There are many other major poststructuralist works dealing with

security, and I would particularly point to Mick Dillon's *Politics of Security*<sup>102</sup> and the excellent collection of essays edited by Dillon and Campbell, *The Political Subject of Violence*,<sup>103</sup> as good examples of fundamentally challenging work on security. Poststructuralist work does not sit easily with the traditional literature on security studies because it starts from completely different assumptions and from an entirely different intellectual tradition. Campbell's work on Bosnia is of special interest precisely because it does try to discuss policy options, and practical politics, something that poststructuralists are often accused of ignoring. There will be no easy adoption of poststructuralist work by the mainstream, nor by many of the alternative approaches discussed above, but I find their reconfiguration of politics to be profoundly important, implying as it does that most of the literature on security studies is not so much a study of the practice as the very practice itself.

#### CONCLUSION

In this piece I have summarized seven schools of thought about security studies, all of which lie outside the mainstream. I am not arguing that there has not been dissent before, nor that all security specialists would accept the assumptions of the traditional literature. But what is most noticeable about the last 20 years is that security is now genuinely a contested concept. There is no precedent to the massive debates within the discipline about matters such as the referent object of security and the content of the concept of security itself. This is exciting, and it is fitting that the sub-field ends this century in this state of insecurity. For me, the most important development in security studies has been the questioning of the assumptions underlying it. Despite this, the subject remains very closely linked to the state and to the practice of ensuring military security. That is not surprising, but, as many of the writers discussed above have argued, that focus is not neutral.

All of which brings me full circle. I well remember the excitement of being able to tell students about how the world of international security really was. I knew what security was, and I never really questioned my role. I was the neutral observer, even if I had my values and wanted to critique the policies of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. But my political imagination stopped there. It did not stop there because of my values, nor did it stop there because I could not say and write what I wanted; it stopped there because I had such a narrow view of security

and a very narrow view of politics. I was an explainer, and I never really questioned the impact of that epistemological position on the resulting assumptions about ontology, what the world was like. I was a prisoner of my 'theory' of knowledge, and I therefore could not see the importance of thinking about my role in reinforcing some political practices rather than others.

The great achievement of security studies in the last 20 years has been to question the assumptions of the sub-field, and to break free from the cosy world of strategic studies. Once one realizes that being a strategist is to make a political and normative choice, even if this is done unquestioningly, then there can be no neutral place to pronounce on security as political practice. Once one does that, one can start thinking about other referent points for security other than the state, and perhaps realize that strategic studies might be antithetical to the achievement of human emancipation. As the state gets problematized so it becomes less secure. The paradox is that this may well be good for the security of individuals. The great achievement of the last 20 years of security studies is that the sub-field has succeeded in making the core concepts less secure and more a matter of debate. In my judgement, the alternative approaches discussed in this paper offer a much more extensive and problematized account of security than was the case 20 years ago. Questioning who security is for, how it is achieved, and what it means for whom are the kinds of questions that were not asked then, but which seem so obvious now. These are the questions posed by many of the alternative approaches discussed above, and they offer far more space to discuss security than was the case in the past when security studies was very secure, and very policed. It is my conclusion that the sub-field is in a far healthier state than then, even if, no, *because*, it is less secure about its referent points, about the meaning of security and above all about its foundations.

#### NOTES

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